

STORIES AND  
PICTURES

ISAAC LOEB PEREZ







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BY

ISAAC LOEB PEREZ

TRANSLATED FROM THE YIDDISH BY

HELENA FRANK

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1906

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## PREFACE

My heartfelt thanks are due to all those who, directly or indirectly, have helped in the preparation of this book of translations; among the former, to Professor Israel Abrahams, for invaluable help and advice at various junctures; and to Mr. B. B., for his detailed and scholarly explanations of difficult passages—explanations to which, fearing to overload a story-book with notes, I have done scant justice.

The sympathetic reader who wishes for information concerning the author of these tales will find it in Professor Wiener's "History of Yiddish Literature in the Nineteenth Century," together with much that will help him to a better appreciation of their drift.

To fully understand any one of them, we should need to know intimately the life of the Russian Jews who figure in their pages, and to be familiar with the lore of the Talmud and the Kabbalah, which colors their talk as the superstitions of Slav or Celtic lands color the talk of their respective peasants.

A Yiddish writer once told me, he feared these tales would be too *tief-jüdisch* (intensely Jewish) for Gentile readers; and even in the case of the Jewish English-reading public, the "East (of Europe) is East, and West is West."

Perez, however, is a distinctly modern writer, and his views and sympathies are of the widest.

He was born in 1855, and these stories were all written, quite broadly speaking, between 1875 and 1900. They were all published in Russia, under the censorship—a fact to be borne in mind when reading such pages as “Travel-Pictures” (which, by the way, is not a story at all), “In the Post-Chaise,” and others.

We may hope that conditions of life such as are depicted in “The Dead Town” will soon belong entirely to history. It is for those who have seen to tell us whether or not the picture is correct.

The future of Yiddish in a Free Russia is hard to tell. There are some who consider its early disappearance by no means a certainty. However that may be, it is at present the only language by which the masses of the Russian Jews can be reached, and Perez’s words of 1894, in which he urges the educated writers to remember this fact, have lost none of their interest:

“Nowadays everyone must work for his own, must plough and sow his own particular plot of land, although, or rather *because* we believe that the future will represent one universal store, whither shall be carried all the corn of all the harvests. . . .

“We do not wish to desert the flag of universal humanity.

“We do not wish to sow the weeds of Chauvinism, the thorns of fanaticism, the tares of scholastic philosophy.

“We want to pull up the weeds by the roots, to cut down the briars, to burn the tares, and to sow the pure grain of human ideas, human feelings, and knowledge.

“We will break up our bit of land, and plough and sow, because we firmly believe that some day there will be a great common store, out of which all the hungry will be fed alike.

“We believe that storm and wind and rain will have an

end, that a day is coming when earth shall yield her increase, and heaven give warmth and light!

"And we do not wish *our* people, in the day of harvest, to stand apart, weeping for misspent years, while the rest make holiday, forced to beg, with shame, for bread that was earned by the sweat and toil of others.

"We want to bring a few sheaves to the store as well as they; we want to be husbandmen also."

Whenever, in the course of translation, I have come across a Yiddish proverb or idiomatic expression of which I knew an English equivalent, I have used the latter without hesitation. To avoid tiresome circumlocutions, some of the more important Yiddish words (most of them Hebrew) have been preserved in the translation. A list of them with brief explanations will be found on page 453. Nevertheless footnotes had to be resorted to in particular cases.

To conclude: I have frequently, in this preface, used the words "was" and "were," because I do not know what kaleidoscopic changes may not have taken place in Russo-Jewish life since these tales were written.

But they are all, with exception of the legend "The Image," tales of the middle or the end of the nineteenth century, and chiefly the latter.

HELENA FRANK

January, 1906



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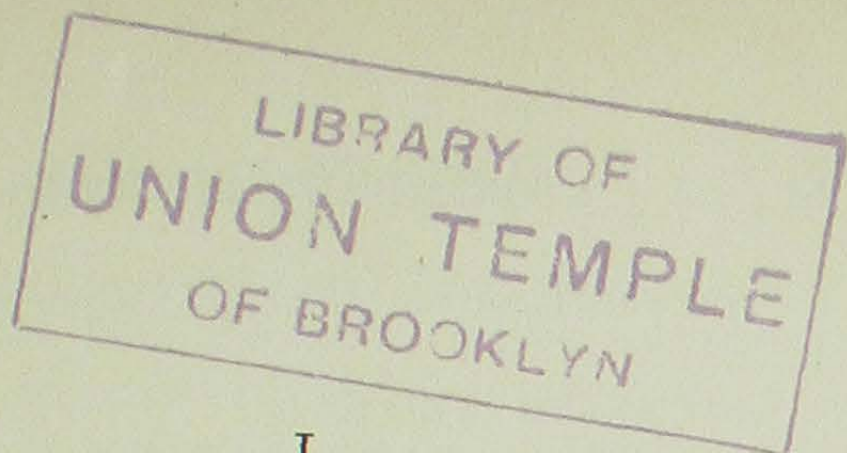
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I

IF NOT HIGHER





# I

## IF NOT HIGHER

And the Rebbe of Nemirov, every Friday morning early at Sliches-time, disappeared, melted into thin air! He was not to be found anywhere, either in the synagogue or in the two houses-of-study, or worshipping in some Minyan, and most certainly not at home. His door stood open, people went in and out as they pleased—no one ever stole anything from the Rebbe—but there was not a soul in the house.

Where can the Rebbe be?

Where *should* he be, if not in heaven?

Is it likely a Rebbe should have no affairs on hand with the Solemn Days so near?

Jews (no evil eye!) need a livelihood, peace, health, successful match-makings, they wish to be good and pious and their sins are great, and Satan with his thousand eyes spies out the world from one end to the other, and he sees, and accuses, and tells tales—and who shall help if not the Rebbe? So thought the people.

Once, however, there came a Lithuanian—and he laughed! You know the Lithuanian Jews—they rather despise books of devotion, but stuff themselves with the Talmud and the codes. Well, the Lithuanian points out a special bit of the Gemoreh—and hopes it is plain enough: even Moses our Teacher could not ascend into heaven, but remained suspended thirty inches below

it—and who, I ask you, is going to argue with a Lithuanian?

What becomes of the Rebbe?

“I don’t know, and I don’t care,” says he, shrugging his shoulders, and all the while (what it is to be a Lithuanian!) determined to find out.

---

The very same evening, soon after prayers, the Lithuanian steals into the Rebbe’s room, lays himself down under the Rebbe’s bed, and lies low.

He intends to stay there all night to find out where the Rebbe goes, and what he does at Sliches-time.

Another in his place would have dozed and slept the time away. Not so a Lithuanian—he learned a whole treatise of the Talmud by heart!

Day has not broken when he hears the call to prayer.

The Rebbe has been awake some time. The Lithuanian has heard him sighing and groaning for a whole hour. Whoever has heard the groaning of the Nemirover Rebbe knows what sorrow for All-Israel, what distress of mind, found voice in every groan. The soul that heard was dissolved in grief. But the heart of a Lithuanian is of cast-iron. The Lithuanian hears and lies still. The Rebbe lies still, too—the Rebbe, long life to him, *upon* the bed and the Lithuanian *under* the bed!

---

After that the Lithuanian hears the beds in the house squeak—the people jump out of them—a Jewish word is spoken now and again—water is poured on the fingers—

a door is opened here and there. Then the people leave the house, once more it is quiet and dark, only a very little moonlight comes in through the shutter.

He confessed afterwards, did the Lithuanian, that when he found himself alone with the Rebbe terror took hold of him. He grew cold all over, and the roots of his ear-locks pricked his temples like needles. An excellent joke, to be left alone with the Rebbe at Sliches-time before dawn!

But a Lithuanian is dogged. He quivers and quakes like a fish—but he does not budge.

At last the Rebbe, long life to him, rises in his turn.

First he does what beseems a Jew. Then he goes to the wardrobe and takes out a packet—which proves to be the dress of a peasant: linen trousers, high boots, a pelisse, a wide felt hat, and a long and broad leather belt studded with brass nails. The Rebbe puts them on.

Out of the pockets of the pelisse dangles the end of a thick cord, a peasant's cord.

On his way out the Rebbe steps aside into the kitchen, stoops, takes a hatchet from under a bed, puts it into his belt, and leaves the house. The Lithuanian trembles, but he persists.

---

A fearful, Solemn-Day hush broods over the dark streets, broken not unfrequently by a cry of supplication from some little Minyan, or the moan of some sick person behind a window.

The Rebbe keeps to the street side, and walks in the shadow of the houses.

He glides from one to the other, the Lithuanian after him. And the Lithuanian hears the sound of his own heart-beats mingle with the heavy footfall of the Rebbe; but he follows on, and together they emerge from the town.

---

Behind the town stands a little wood. The Rebbe, long life to him, enters it. He walks on thirty or forty paces, and then he stops beside a small tree. And the Lithuanian, with amaze, sees the Rebbe take his hatchet and strike the tree. He sees the Rebbe strike blow after blow, he hears the tree creak and snap. And the little tree falls, and the Rebbe splits it up into logs, and the logs into splinters. Then he makes a bundle, binds it round with the cord, throws it on his shoulder, replaces the hatchet in his belt, leaves the wood, and goes back into the town.

In one of the back streets he stops beside a poor, tumble-down little house, and taps at the window.

"Who is there?" cries a frightened voice within. The Lithuanian knows it to be the voice of a Jewess, a sick Jewess.

"I," answers the Rebbe in the peasant tongue.

"Who is I?" inquires the voice further. And the Rebbe answers again in the Little-Russian speech:

"Vassil."

"Which Vassil? and what do you want, Vassil?"

"I have wood to sell," says the sham peasant, "very cheap, for next to nothing."

And without further ado he goes in. The Lithuanian

steals in behind him, and sees, in the gray light of dawn, a poor room with poor, broken furniture.

In the bed lies a sick Jewess huddled up in rags, who says bitterly:

"Wood to sell—and where am I, a poor widow, to get the money from to buy it?"

"I will give you a six-groschen worth on credit."

"And how am I ever to repay you?" groans the poor woman.

"Foolish creature!" the Rebbe upbraids her. "See here: you are a poor sick Jewess, and I am willing to trust you with the little bundle of wood; I believe that in time you will repay me. And you, you have such a great and mighty God, and you do not trust Him! not even to the amount of a miserable six-groschen for a little bundle of wood!"

"And who is to light the stove?" groans the widow. "Do I look like getting up to do it? and my son away at work!"

"I will also light the stove for you," said the Rebbe.

---

And the Rebbe, while he laid the wood in the stove, repeated groaning the first part of Sliches.

Then, when the stove was alight, and the wood crackled cheerily, he repeated, more gaily, the second part of Sliches.

He repeated the third part when the fire had burnt itself out, and he shut the stove doors. . . .

---

The Lithuanian who saw all this remained with the Rebbe, as one of his followers.

And later, when anyone told how the Rebbe early every morning at Sliches-time raised himself and flew up into heaven, the Lithuanian, instead of laughing, added quietly:

“If not higher.”

II

DOMESTIC HAPPINESS



## II

### DOMESTIC HAPPINESS

Chaïm is a street porter.

When he goes through the town stooping beneath his case of wares, one can hardly make him out—it looks as if the box were walking along on two feet of its own. Listen to the heavy breathing! One can hear it quite a long way off.

But now he lays down his load, and is given a few pence. He straightens himself, wipes the sweat off his face, draws a deep breath, goes to the fountain and takes a drink of water, and then runs into the court.

He stands close to the wall, and lifts his huge head till the point of his chin and the tip of his nose and the brim of his hat are all on a level.

“Hannah,” he calls.

A little window opens just below the eaves, and a small female head in a white kerchief answers, “Chaïm!”

The two look at each other very contentedly.

The neighbors say they are “loving.”

Chaïm tosses up his earnings wrapped in a piece of paper, and Hannah catches them in the air—not for the first time in her life, either!

“You’re a wonder!” says Chaïm, and shows no disposition to go away.

“Off with you, Chaïm!” she says, smiling. “I daren’t take my eyes off the sick child. I have stood the cradle

near the fire-place, and I skim with one hand and rock with the other."

"How is it, poor little thing?"

"Better."

"God be praised! Where is Henne?"

"With the sempstress, learning to sew."

"And Yossele?"

"In Cheder."

Chaïm lowers his chin and goes away. Hannah follows him with her eyes till he disappears. Thursday and Friday it lasts longer.

"How much have you got there in the paper?" inquires Hannah.

"Twenty-two groschen."

"I am afraid it is not enough!"

"Why, what do you want, Hannah?"

"A sechser's worth of ointment for the baby, a few farthing dips—a Sabbath loaf I have—oh! meat—a pound and a half—let me see—and brandy for the Kiddush, and a few splinters."

"Those I can get for you. There are sure to be some in the market."

"And then I want," and she makes a calculation of all she needs for Sabbath, and it comes to this: that one can say the Kiddush quite well over a loaf, and that there are heaps of things one can do without.

The two important ones are: the candles to say the blessing over and the salve for the child.

And if only the children, God helping, are well, and the metal candle-sticks not in pawn, and supposing there is even a pudding, they spend a cheerful Sabbath.

Hannah is wonderful at puddings!

She is always short of something, either meal or eggs or suet, and the end of it all is a sweet, succulent, altogether ravishing pudding—it melts away into the very limbs!

“An angel’s handiwork!” says Hannah, smiling delightedly.

“An angel’s is it?” Chaïm laughs. “You think you are a little angel, do you, because you put up with me and the children? Well, they worry you enough, goodness knows! And I’m a regular crosspatch, *I* am, at times—and never a curse do I get—you’re not like other women. And what a comfort I must be to you, too! I’m no good at Kiddush or Havdoleh either—I can’t even sing the hymns properly!”

“You’re a good husband and a good father,” persists Hannah. “I ask no better for myself or anyone else. God grant that we may grow old together, you and I!”

And they gaze into each other’s eyes so kindly and so affectionately as it were from the very heart. It looks for all the world as if they were newly married, and the party at table grows more and more festive.

But directly after his nap, Chaïm repairs to the little synagogue to hear the Law—a teacher expounds *Alshech*<sup>1</sup> there to simple folk like himself.

The faces still look sleepy.

One is finishing his doze, another yawns loudly. But all of a sudden, when it comes to the right moment, when there is talk of the other world, of Gehenna, where the wicked are scourged with iron rods, of the lightsome

<sup>1</sup> A Bible commentator of the sixteenth century.

Garden of Eden, where the just sit with golden crowns on their heads and study the Torah, then they come to life again! The mouths open, the cheeks flush, they listen breathlessly to be told what the next world will be like. Chaïm usually stands near the stove.

His eyes are full of tears, he trembles all over, he is all there, in the other world!

He suffers together with the wicked; he is immersed in the molten pitch, he is flung away into hell; he gathers chips and splinters in gloomy woods. . . .

He goes through it all himself, and is covered with a cold sweat. But then, later on, he also shares the bliss of the righteous. The Garden of Eden, the angels, Leviathan, Behemoth, and all good things present themselves so vividly to his imagination that when the reader kisses the book previously to closing it, Chaïm starts as it were out of a dream, like one called back from the other world!

"*Ach!*" he gasps, for wonder has held him breathless. "O Lord, just a tiny bit, just a scrap, just a morsel of the world to come—for me, for my wife, and for my little children!"

And then he grows sad, wondering: After all, because of what? as a reward for what?

Once, when the reading was over, he went up to the teacher:

"Rabbi," he said, and his voice shook, "advise me! What must I do to gain the world to come?"

"Study the Law, my son!" answered the teacher.

"I can't."

"Study Mishnayes, or some "Eye of Jacob," or even Perek."

"I can't."

"Recite the Psalms!"

"I haven't time!"

"Pray with devotion!"

"I don't know what the prayers mean!" The teacher looks at him with compassion:

"What are you?" he asks.

"A street porter."

"Well, then, do some service for the scholars."

"I beg pardon?"

"For instance, carry a few cans of water every day toward evening into the house-of-study, so that the students may have something to drink."

"Rabbi," he inquired further, "and my wife?"

"When a man sits on a chair in Paradise, his wife is his footstool."

---

When Chaïm went home to say Havdoleh, Hannah was sitting there reciting "God of Abraham." And when he saw her he felt a tug at his heart.

"No, Hannah," he flung his arms around her, "I won't have you be my footstool! I shall bend down to you and raise you and make you sit beside me. We shall sit both on one chair, just as we are doing now. We are so happy like that! Do you hear, Hannah? You and I, we are going to sit in a chair together . . . the Almighty will *have* to allow it!"



III

IN THE POST-CHAISE



### III

#### IN THE POST-CHAISE

He told me everything at once, in one breath. I learned in little over a minute that he was Chaïm, Yoneh Krubishever's son-in-law, Beril Konskivoler's son, and that the rich Meerenstein in Lublin was a relation on his mother's side, peace be upon her! But this relation lived almost like a Gentile; whether or not they ate forbidden food, he could not tell, but that they ate with unwashed hands . . . so much he had seen with his own eyes.

They had other queer ways beside: long colored cloths were lying on their stairs; before going in, one rang a bell; figured table-covers were spread about the rooms where people sat as if in jail . . . stole across them like thieves . . . altogether it was like being in a company of deaf-mutes.

His wife has a family of a kind in Warsaw. But he never goes near them; they are as poor as himself, so what is the good of them to him, *ha?*

In the house of the Lublin relation things are not as they should be, but, at least, he is rich, and whoso rubs against fat meat gets shiny himself; where they chop wood, there are splinters; where there is a meal, one may chance to lick a bone—but those others—paupers!

He even counts on the Lublin relation's obtaining a place for him. Business, he says, is bad; just now he is

dealing in eggs, buys them in the villages, and sends them to Lublin, whence they are despatched to London. There, it is said, people put them into lime-ovens and hatch chickens out of them. It must be lies. The English just happen to *like* eggs! However that may be, the business, for the present, is in a bad way. Still, it is better than dealing in produce—produce is knocked on the head. He became a produce dealer soon after his marriage; he had everything to learn, and his partner was an old dealer who simply turned his pockets inside out.

---

It was dark in the post-chaise—I could not see Chaïm's face, and I don't know to this day how he recognized a fellow-Jew in me. When he got in, I was sitting in a corner dozing, and was only awakened by his voice. I don't talk in my sleep—perhaps I gave a Jewish groan. Perhaps he felt that *my* groan and *his* groan were *one* groan?

He even told me that his wife was from Warsaw and did not fancy Konskivòlye. That is, she was born in Krubisheff, but she was brought up in Warsaw by that miserable family of hers—lost her parents.

There she learned to know about *other* things. She could talk Polish and read German addresses fluently. She even says that she can play, not on a fiddle, but on some other instrument.

“And who are you?” and he seized me by the hand.

Sleep was out of the question, and he had begun to interest me. It was like a story. A young man from a small provincial town; a wife brought up in Warsaw—

she is impatient of the small town. Something might be made of it, I reflect; one must know exactly how it all is, then add a little to it, and it will make a novel. I will put in a villain, a convict, a bankruptcy or two, and rush in a dragon—I, too, will be interesting!

I lean toward my neighbor, and tell him who I am.

"So it's you," he said, "is it? You yourself! Tell me, I beg of you, how do you find the time and attention required for inventing stories?"

"Well, you see . . . ."

"How can I see? You must have inherited a large fortune, and you are living on the interest?"

"Heaven forbid! My parents are alive."

"Then you won in the lottery?"

"Wrong again!"

"Then, what?"

I really did not know how to answer.

"Do you make a living by *that*?"

I gave a genuinely Jewish reply—*Bê!*

"And that is your whole Parnosseh, without anything additional?"

"For the present."

"O *wa!* how much does it bring in?"

"Very little."

"A bad business, too?"

"Knocked on the head!"

"Bad times!" sighed my neighbor.

A few minutes' silence, but he could not be quiet long.

"Tell me, I beg of you, what is the good of the stories you write? I don't mean to *you*," he amended himself.

"Heaven forbid! A Jew must earn a living, if he has to suck it out of the wall—that is not what I mean—what will a Jew not do for a living? I am riding in the post-chaise, and not in an 'opportunity,'<sup>1</sup> because I could not hear of one. Heaven knows whether I'm not sitting on Shatnez.<sup>2</sup> I mean the people—what is the good of the stories to *them*? What is the object of them? What do they put into story books?" Then, answering himself: "I guess it's just a question of women's fashions, like crinolines!"

"And you," I ask, "have never dipped into a story-book?"

"I can tell *you*: I do know a *little* about them, as much as that."

And he measured off a small piece of his finger, but it was dark in the chaise.

"Did they interest you?"

"*Me?* Heaven forbid! It was all through my wife! This, you see, is how it happened: It must be five or six years ago—six—a year after the wedding, we were still boarding with my father—when my wife grew poorly. Not that she was ill; she went about as usual, but she was not up to the mark.

"One day I asked her what was wrong.

"But, really—" he caught himself up. "I don't know why I should bother you with all this."

"Please, go on!"

My neighbor laughed.

<sup>1</sup> Conveyance opportunely going the same way.

<sup>2</sup> Shatnez, mixture of wool and linen, forbidden in the Pentateuch.

"Is straw wanted in Egypt? Do you want *my* stories, when you can invent your own?"

"Do, please, go on!"

"Apparently, you write fiction for other people and want truth for yourself?"

It does not occur to him that one might wish to write the truth.

"Well," he said, "so be it!"

---

"Well," repeated my neighbor, "there's nothing to be ashamed of. We had a room to ourselves, I was a young man then, more given to that sort of thing—and I asked her what was the matter. She burst out crying!"

"I felt very sorry for her. Besides being my wife, she was an orphan, away from her home, and altogether much to be pitied."

"Why so much to be pitied?" I wonder.

"You see, my mother, peace be upon her, died about two years before the marriage, and my father, peace be upon him, did not marry again.

"My mother, may her merits protect us, was a good woman, and my father could not forget her. Well, a woman alone in the house! My father, peace be upon him, had no time to spare—he was away nearly the whole week in the villages—he traded in all sorts of things, whatever you please—eggs, butter, rags, hogs' bristles, linen."

"And you?"

"I sat in the house-of-study and learned. Well, I re-

flected, a woman gets frightened all by herself; but why cry? No, she said, she was dull. Dull? What was that?

"I saw that she went about like one half asleep. Sometimes she did not hear when spoken to, or she seemed absent-minded, and sat staring at the wall—stared and stared—or else, her lips moved and never a sound to be heard. But as to being dull—all a woman's fancy. An unaccountable folk, women! A Jew, a man, is never dull. A Jew has no time to be dull, a Jew is either hungry or full; either he has business on hand, or he is in the house-of-study, or asleep; if one has *heaps* of time one smokes a pipe; but dull!"

"Remember," I put in, "a woman has no Torah, no Kohol affairs, no six hundred and thirteen religious obligations."

"That's just where it is! I soon came to the conclusion that being dull meant having nothing to do—a sort of emptiness calculated to drive one mad. Our sages saw that long ago. Do you know the saying, 'Idleness leads the mind to wander?' According to the law, no woman may be idle. I said to her: Do something! She said, she wanted to 'read'!

"'To read,' sounded very queer to me, too. I knew that people who know how to write call 'learning,' *lehavdil*, reading books and newspapers, but I did *not* know then that she was so learned. . . . She spoke less to me than I to her. She was a tall woman; but she kept her head down and her lips closed as though she could not count two. She was quiet altogether—quiet as a lamb; and there was always a look in her face as if a whole ship full of sour milk had foundered at

sea. She wanted to read, she said. And what? Polish, German, even Yiddish—anything to read.

“In all Konskivòlye there wasn’t a book to be found. I was very sorry—I couldn’t refuse her. I told her I would get her some books when I went to see my relative in Lublin.

“‘And *you* have nothing?’ she asked.

“‘*I?* Preserve us!’

“‘But what do you do all day in the house-of-study?’

“‘I learn.’

“‘I want to learn, too,’ says she.

“I explained to her that the Gemoreh is not a story-book, that it is not meant for women, that it had been said women should not study it, that it is Hebrew. . .

“I gave her to understand that if the Konskivòlye people heard of such a thing, they would stone me, and quite right, too! I won’t keep you in suspense, but tell you at once that she begged so hard of me, cried, fainted, made such a to-do that she had her way. I sat down every evening and translated a page of the Gemoreh for her benefit; but I knew what the end of it would be.”

“And what was it?”

“You need not ask. I translated a page about goring oxen, ditches, setting on fire,<sup>1</sup> commentaries and all. I held forth, and she went to sleep over it night after night. That sort of thing was not intended for women. By good fortune, however, it happened that, during the great gale that blew that year, a certain book-peddler wandered out of his way into Konskivòlye, and I

<sup>1</sup> From the Talmudical treatise on damages.

brought her home forty pounds' weight of story-books. Now it was the other way about—*she* read to *me*, and—I went to sleep.

“And to this day,” he wound up, “I don’t know what is the use of story-books. At any rate, for men. Perhaps you write for women?”

---

Meanwhile it began to dawn; my neighbor’s long, thin, yellow face became visible—with a pair of black-ringed, tired-looking red eyes.

He was apparently anxious to recite his prayers, and began to polish the window-pane, but I interrupted him.

“Tell me, my friend, don’t take it amiss. Is your wife content *now*?”

“How, content?”

“She is no longer dull?”

“She has a stall with salt and herrings; one child at the breast and two to wash and comb. She has a day’s work blowing their noses.”

Again he rubs the pane, and again I question:

“Tell me, friend, what is your wife like?”

My neighbor sat up, threw a side-glance at me, looked me down from head to foot, and asked severely:

“Then you know my wife? From Warsaw, eh?”

“Not in the least,” I answered; “I only mean, in case I am ever in *Konskivòlye*, so that I may recognize her.”

“So that you may recognize her?” he smiles, reassured. “I’ll give you a sign: she has a mole on the left side of her nose.”

---

The Jew got down from the chaise, giving me a cold and distant farewell as he stood on the step. He evi-

dently still suspected me of knowing his wife and of belonging to her miserable family in Warsaw.

I was left alone in the chaise, but it was useless to think of sleep. The cool morning had taken hold of me. My literary overcoat blew out in the wind, and I felt chilly all over. I shrank together in the corner. The sun began to shine outside. It may be that I was riding through beautiful country; the early rays may have kissed hill-tops and green trees, and slid down a glassy river; but I hadn't the courage to open the little window.

A Jewish author fears the cold! I began, as the Jew put it, to "think out" a story. But other thoughts came in between.

Two different worlds, a man's world and a woman's world—a world with Talmudical treatises on goring oxen, and ditches, and incendiary fires, and the damages to be paid for them, and a world with story-books that are sold by weight!

If *he* reads, *she* goes to sleep; if *she* reads, *he* goes to sleep! As if we were not divided enough, as if we had not already "French noses," "English sticks," "Dutch Georges," "Lithuanian pigs," "Polish beggars," "Palestinian tramps;" as though every part of our body were not lying in a different place and had not a resounding nickname; as though every part, again, had not fallen into smaller ones: Chassidîm, Misnagdîm, "Germans;" as though all this were not, we must needs divide ourselves into men and women—and every single, narrow, damp, and dirty Jewish room must contain these two worlds within itself.

These two at least ought to be united. To strive after their unification is a debt every Yiddish writer owes his public. Only, the writers have too many private debts beside—one requires at least one additional Parnosseh, as he said.

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My reflections about an additional Parnosseh were broken in upon by a few sharp notes on the postillion's horn. But I did not leave the chaise. I was just feeling a little warmer, and the sun had begun to pour in his beams.

I got a new neighbor and, thanks to the bright daylight, I saw his face plainly and even recognized him. It was an old acquaintance, we had skated together as children, played at bakers—we were almost comrades—then I went to the dingy, dirty Cheder, and he, to the free, lightsome “gymnasium.”<sup>1</sup>

When I did not know the lesson, I was beaten; when I answered right, they pinched my cheek—it hurt either way.

He was sometimes kept in and sometimes he got “fives;”<sup>2</sup> I broke my head over the Talmud; he broke his over Greek and Latin. But we stuck together. We lived on neighborly terms; he taught me to read in secret, lent me books, and in after years we turned the world upside down as we lay on the green grass beside the river. I wanted to invent a kind of gunpowder

<sup>1</sup> College.

<sup>2</sup> Five good marks, the highest number given in the Russian schools.

that should shoot at great distances, say one hundred miles; he, a balloon in which to mount to the stars and bring the people "up there" to a sense of order and enlightenment. We were dreadfully sorry for the poor world, she was stuck in the mud—and how to get her out? Ungreased wheels, lazy horses, and the driver—asleep!

Then I married, and he went to a university. We never corresponded. I heard later that he had failed, and, instead of a doctor, had become an apothecary somewhere in a small country town . . .

I all but cried out for joy when my new neighbor entered the chaise, and my heart grew warm; my hands stretched themselves out; my whole body leaned toward him, but I held myself back—I held myself back with all my strength.

There you are! I thought. It is Yanek Polnivski, our late sequestrator's son. He was my playfellow, he had a large embrace and wanted to put his arms round the whole world and kiss its every limb, except the ugly growths which should be cut away. Only—there you are again! Present-day times. Perhaps he is an anti-Semite, breathing death and destruction in the newspapers; perhaps now we Jews are the excrescences that need removing from Europe's shapely nose. He will measure me with a cold glance, or he may embrace me, but tell me, at the same time, that I am not as other Jews.

But I was mistaken. Polnivski recognized me, fell upon my neck, nor had I spoken a word before he asked me how I liked "this vile anti-Semitism."

"It is," he said to me, of course in Polish, "a kind of cholera—an epidemic."

"Some say it is political."

"I don't believe it," said Polnivski. "Politicians invent nothing new, they create no *facts*. They only use those which exist, suppress some, and make the most of others. They can fan the flame of hell-fire, but not a spark can they kindle for themselves. It is human nature, not the politician, that weaves the thread of history. The politicians plait it, twist it, knot it, and entangle it.

"Anti-Semitism is a disease. The politician stands by the patient's bedside like a dishonest doctor who tries to spin out the sickness.

"The politician makes use of anti-Semitism—a stone flies through the air and Bismarck's assistant directs it through the window of the Shool; otherwise *other* panes would be smashed. Does anyone raise a protesting fist? Immediately a thin, shrinking Jewish shoulder is thrust beneath it, otherwise *other* bones would crack.

"But the stone, the fist, the hatred, and the detestation, these exist of themselves.

"Who die of a physical epidemic? Children, old people, and invalids. Who fall victims to a moral pestilence? The populace, the decadent aristocrat, and a few lunatics who caper round and lead the dance. Only the healthy brains resist."

"How many healthy brains have we?" I asked.

"How many? Unhappily, very few," replied Polnivski.

There was a short, sad silence. I do not know what

my neighbor's thoughts may have been; it seemed to *me* that the strongest and best-balanced brains had not escaped infection. There are two different phases in history: one in which the best and cleverest man leads the mass, and one in which the mass carries the best and cleverest along with it. The popular leader is a Columbus in search of new happiness, a new America for mankind; but no sooner is there scarcity of bread and water on board than the men mutiny, and *they* lead. The first thing is to kill somebody, the next, to taste meat, and still their hatred."

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"And don't suppose," said Polnivski, "that I am fishing for compliments, that I consider myself an *esprit fort*, who runs no danger of infection, an oak-tree no gale can dislodge.

"No, brother," he went on, "I am no hero. I might have been like the rest; I also might have been torn like a decayed leaf from the tree of knowledge, and whirled about in the air. I might have tried to think, with the rest of the dead leaves, that it was a ball, and we were dancing for our enjoyment; that the wind was our hired musician who played to us on his flute.

"I was saved by an accident; I learned to know a Jewish woman. Listen!"

I leaned toward my neighbor. His face had grown graver, darker; he rested his elbows on his knees and supported his head with his hands.

"But don't suppose," he said again, "that I discovered the heroine of a romance, a strong character that breaks through bolt and bar, and goes proudly on

its way. Don't suppose that she was an 'exception,' an educated woman full of the new ideas, or, in fact, any 'ideal' at all. No; I learned to know a simple Jewish woman—one of the best, but one of the best of those who are most to be pitied. I learned to love her, and I'll tell you the truth: Whenever I read anything against Jews in general, she comes back to my mind with her soft, sad eyes; stands before me and begs: 'Do not believe it. I am not like that.' "

He is lost in thought.

"The story is a simple one," he rouses himself and begins afresh. "We have not written to one another the whole time, and you don't know what has happened to me, so I'll tell you—briefly. I am only going as far as Lukave.

"On leaving the gymnasium I entered the university and studied medicine. I did *not* finish the course; it was partly my comrades' fault, partly the teachers', and most of all my own. I had to leave and become an apothecary, had to marry, take my marriage portion, and set up a shop full of cod-liver oil in a little out-of-the-way town. But I was fortunate in many ways. I had a good father-in-law, who was prompt in fulfilling the contract, a pretty wife—it was a little bit of a town.

"My wife's name was Maria—I see her before me now, turning round helplessly from the looking-glass. Her golden curls refuse to submit to the comb, they fly merrily in all directions; they will not be twisted into the wreath which was just then the fashion.

"Slender—and such good, laughing, sky-blue eyes.

"We were not much disturbed by my professional

duties. The town was too poor and an apothecary shop where there is no doctor isn't worth much. There was little doing, but we lived in a paradise, and we were always on the veranda—it was summer-time—side by side, hand in hand.

“And what should have claimed our interest? We had enough to live on, and as for going out, where were we to go? The veranda overlooked nearly the whole town—the low, sagging houses, broad, black, wooden booths that leaned, as though in pity, over the roll and apple sellers at their wretched stalls before the house-doors, as though they wanted to protect the old, withered, wrinkled faces from the sun.

“The town had once been rich, the booths full of all kinds of produce and fruits, the market full of carts, peasants, and brokers; sometimes even a great nobleman would be seen among the white peasant coats and the gray kaftans (at least so they assured me in the town), but the *chaussée* and the railroad had thrown everything out. The streets were empty, the booths filled with decayed onions and pieces of cheese—all that was left of the good times.

“Poor as poor can be. Ten traders threw themselves on every cart-load of corn brought in by the peasants, raised the price, then came to an agreement, promised cession money, and bought it in common; but not one of the ten could find in his pockets the wherewith to pay, and they borrowed money on interest. There were one hundred tailors to a pair of trousers; fifty cobblers to put in one patch. In all my born days I never saw such poverty.

“We kept away from the town as much as possible—the happy are selfish.

"But somehow we could not help noticing a young housewife opposite, not more than eighteen or twenty at most, and we could neither of us take our eyes off her, and she, apparently, couldn't take hers off us. It was an unusual sight. Imagine a beauty, a perfect picture, set in a frame as dirty as only a Jewish window in a small town can be, beneath a dreadfully bent roof. Imagine a pair of sad, soft, dreamy eyes in an alabaster white face and under a hair-band.

"She made a terribly sad impression on us.

"For hours together she would stand leaning in the window, her fingers twisted together, staring at us, or else at the stars, and swallowing her tears. We saw that she was always alone (your men never have any time to spare), always unhappy and wistful. Her face spoke for her. She is a stranger here, we decided; she has come from a larger house, less shut in, and she longs to be far away; her heart yearns after a freer life. She also wanted to live, to live and to be loved. No, you may say what you like, but you *do* sometimes sell your daughters. It is true that after a while they forget. They are pious and good and patient, but who shall count the tears that fall over their saddened faces till the store is exhausted? Or note what the heart suffers till it resigns itself to its living death? And why should it be so? Just because they are good and pious? You should have seen the husband—yellow, shrunk together. I saw him twice a day—go out in the morning and come home at night.

"A shame!"

You will believe that I had no answer ready.

We were both silent for a time, and then Polnivski went on:

"Once we missed her. She did not appear at the window all day.

"She must be ill, we thought.

"That evening the husband came in—the yellow creature—and asked for a remedy.

"‘What sort?’

"‘I don’t know,’ he said; ‘a remedy.’

"‘For whom?’

"‘You want to know that, too? For my wife.’

"‘What is wrong with her?’

"‘I’m sure I don’t know. She says, her heart hurts her.’

"And that," said Polnivski, "was the occasion of our becoming acquainted. I won’t be long about it. I am a bit of a doctor, too, and I went back with him."

Polnivski had begun to talk in broken sentences; he looked for cigarettes; at last he broke off altogether, opened his travelling-bag and commenced to hunt for matches.

Meantime I was tormented by suspicions.

I now looked at Polnivski with other eyes; his story had begun to pain me.

Who can read a man? Who knows all that is in him? I began to think that I might have before me a Christian weasel who stole into Jewish hen-houses. He is too indignant about the fate of Jewish daughters; he is too long looking for matches; he is ashamed of something. Why will he "not be long about it?" Why won't he

tell me the whole story in detail? Who knows what part he played in it, if not the old part of the serpent in Paradise? Why won't his conscience let him speak out? There it is again—a Jewess—then, why not? At one time it was a merit to christen her; now the approved thing is to incite her to rebel against her God, her parents, her husband, her whole life!

It is called liberalism, entering a prison and letting in a breath of fresh air, a few rays of sunlight; awaking the prisoner, giving him a few gingerbreads and then going—not seeing the prisoner grind his teeth as the rusty key turns in the lock, or how his face darkens, how convulsively he breathes, how he tears his hair; or else, if he still *can* weep, how he waters with bitter tears the mouldy bread at which the mice have been gnawing while he slept.

To waken the dark, slumbering, and oppressed heart of a Jewish woman strikes a romantic chord; to fan the flame of unknown or smouldering feelings; to kiss and then—good-bye! bolt the door! she must make the best of it!

We have been slaked for so long with bitterness, gall, and hatred, that now, when we are offered bread and salt, we feel sure it must be poisoned—even though the hand that holds it out to us shakes with pity; even though there are tears in the eyes, and words of comfort on the lips.

It is so hard to believe in it all. For we also are infected; we also have succumbed to the plague.

Meanwhile Polnivski had found his matches, and I unwillingly accepted a cigarette. We smoked. The

chaise was filled with blue, smoky rings. I watched them, followed them with my eyes, and thought: Thus vanish both good and evil.

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"We made each other's acquaintance," said my Christian neighbor, "but nothing came of it in the way of closer friendship."

"Why not?" I asked, astonished.

"We went on looking at each other like the best of friends, but *she* could not come to us, nor we, to her.

"She had but to try it! It was a most orthodox town, where everyone but the Feldscher and the ladies' tailor wore kaftans. And there was something besides, I don't know what, that kept us back.

"Then the worst misfortune befell me that can befall a man.

"The apothecary's shop brought in next to nothing, and my wife began to fail in health.

"I saw more clearly every day that she was declining, and there was no hope of saving her. She needed Italy, and I could not even provide her with enough to eat; and, you know, when people are in that state of health, they are full of hope and do not believe in their illness.

"The whole pain, the whole anguish has to be suppressed, buried deep in the heart; and no matter how the heart is aching, *you* have to smile and wear a smooth brow. It dies within you every second, and yet you must help to make plans for this time next year, settle about enlarging the house, buying a piano."

His voice changed.

"I am not equal to describing, to living through those times again; but *my* sorrow and *her* sorrow brought us nearer together."

Lukave appeared in the distance.

"I will tell you, in the few minutes I have left, that anyone so unhappy as that woman, and at the same time so full of sympathy and compassion for others, I never saw; and all so simple, so natural, without any exaggeration.

"She never left Maria's bedside; she got round her husband to lend me money at a lower rate of interest. She was our watcher, our housekeeper, our cook, our most devoted friend, and when Maria died, it was almost harder to comfort her than me.

"Then it was I became convinced that hatred between nations is *not* natural. There's just a lot of trouble in the world, and the more passionate would protest, only the false scribe, the political advocate, drafts instead a denunciation of the Jews.

"I saw clearly that the Jews are not inimical to us—that we *can* live in peace."

Lukave draws nearer and nearer to us—or we to it—and still I am afraid of the end. I interrupt him and ask:

"And what became of the woman?"

"How should I know? I buried my wife, sold the apothecary's shop, cried when I said good-bye to my neighbor, and—that's all. Now I live in Lukave. I am not doing well there, either."

"And what was the name of the little town you lived in before?"

"Konska-vola."<sup>1</sup>

"Your neighbor was tall and pale?"

"Yes."

"Thin?"

"Yes—you know her?" he asked, looking pleased.

"She has a mole on the left side of her nose?"

"A mole?" laughed Yanek. "What an idea!"

I think I must have made a mistake and say: "Perhaps on the right side?"

"My dear fellow, what are you talking about?"

"Perhaps you did not notice—and her husband is yellow-skinned?"

"Yes."

"Called Chaïm?"

"I think not, and yet—perhaps——devil may care!"

"But *her* name is Hannah?"

"*Ach*, nonsense! Sarah! I remember I called her Sòruchna. I shouldn't have forgotten her name."

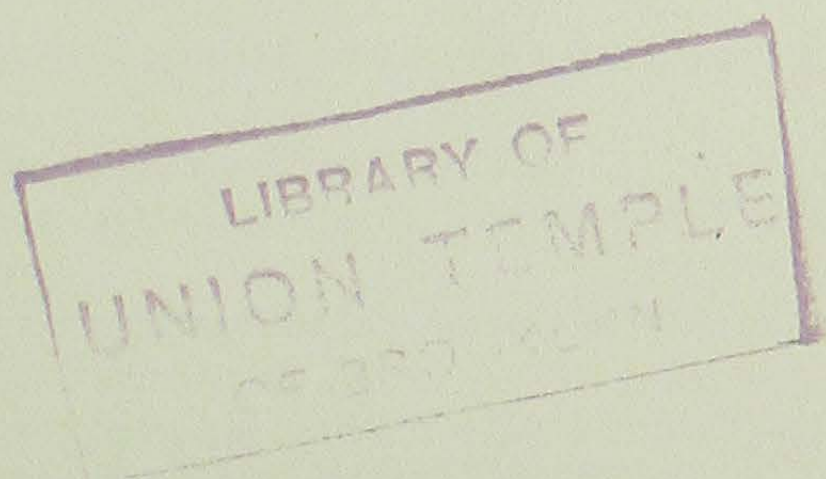
I was the fool. Are there so few Jewish women leading similar lives?

<sup>1</sup> The correct name of the town.



IV

THE NEW TUNE





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THE NEW TUNE

The end of the Day of Atonement.

A blast on the Shofar, and the congregation stirred noisily: "Next year in Jerusalem!" The boys made a dash at the candle-wax on the table, a week-day reader was already at the desk, and the week-day evening prayer was being recited to a week-day tune.

Full tilt they recited the prayers and full tilt they took off robes and prayer-scarfs and began to put on their boots—who has time to spare?

Nobody—not even to remark the pale young man walking round and round among the people, dragging after him a still paler child. It is his third round; but nobody notices him. One is under a seat looking for his boots, another finds somebody has taken his goloshes by mistake or dropped candle-grease on his hat, and all are hungry.

He looks vainly into their faces; he cannot catch a single glance.

"Father, let us go home," begs the child.

"We will go round once more," he answers, "and look for uncle."

Meantime the congregation is preparing to leave. The last Kaddish is said, the last Amen!

The congregation make a rush for the door, carrying along with them the young man and the child.

In the court of the Shool the men begin to recite the blessing on the moon. The women walk away down both sides of the street, forming two white fillets.

On the way home, there is time to count how many women really fainted; how many nearly fainted; and to discuss the reader, who grew hoarser this year than he had ever done before. At every house-door two or three people say good-bye to the rest and go in, while the majority are still in the court of the Shool, gesticulating toward the moon. The pale young man and the pale child still circulate among them. The crowd lessens, and his face darkens; now the last has finished and gone. The young man remains.

"Not one; well, we must do without. I am not going to beg into a new year, just after the Day of Atonement," he murmured, with quivering lips.

The child thinks he is saying the moon-prayer.

"Enough now, father," and he took hold of the man's coat. "Come home!" His voice was full of tears.

"Silly child, why are you in such a hurry?"

"I want to eat; I'm hungry."

"I should think so! Of course, you are hungry, you rogue; you needn't tell me that. Was I likely to think that you wouldn't be, after fasting through a whole Day of Atonement?"

"Come home!" begs the child again.

"Look here, David'l, there's nothing to eat at home, either."

"Just a bit of bread!"

<sup>1</sup> The tenth of Tishri. New Year is Tishri 1.

"There isn't a scrap!"

The child stands still in alarm.

"David'l," say the father, "you know what day this has been?"

The child only sobs quietly.

"To-day, David'l, was the Day of Atonement—a Yôm kodesh.<sup>1</sup> Do you know what that means?"

Yes, the child just nodded.

"Well, tell me, David'l, what have we done all day?"

"Prayed," wept the child.

"Right! And He whose Name is blessed, what has He done?"

"Forgiven us!" (sobbing).

"Well, do you know, David'l, if God, blessed be He, has forgiven us, I think we ought to be cheerful, don't you?"

The child makes no reply.

"You remember, David'l, last year, when mother was alive, how we sang after supper, to a new tune? Do you remember the tune?"

"No."

"I will sing it to remind you, only you must join in."

And the young man began to sing in a weak, hoarse voice. It was not a "Sinni" and not a "Wallach" tune, but it was a gruesome tune that went to one's heart.

The child joined in and sang through his tears.

<sup>1</sup> Holy day. Hebrew.



V

MARRIED



## V

### MARRIED

(Told by a Woman)

I remember myself at the time when I played marbles and made mud cakes in the yard; in winter I sat all day indoors and rocked a little brother who was born sickly, and who lingered on into his seventh year, when he died of a decline.

In summer, whenever it was sunny, the poor little creature sat in the yard, warmed itself in the sun, and watched me playing marbles.

In winter it never left its cradle, and I told it stories and sang to it. The other boys all went to Cheder.

Mother was always busy, she had at least ten Parnos-sehs. Poor mother! she peddled, she baked gingerbread, she helped at circumcisions and weddings, she was a Tikerin, a grave-measurer,<sup>1</sup> recited prayers, and bought in provisions for better-class households.

Father earned three rubles a week keeping accounts for Reb Zeinwill Terkelbaum in the forest. And those were the good times; teachers were paid, and the rent, too—almost on rent-day,—and we never had to eat our bread dry.

<sup>1</sup> In desperate cases of illness, people vow to supply the synagogue with candles equal to the length of certain parts of the cemetery.

Sometimes mother would bake a cake for supper ; then there was quite a feast. But that happened seldom.

Mother usually came home late and tired ; often with red eyes and in a bitter mood. She would complain that the well-to-do ladies owed her money. They would get her to lay out her money for them, and then tell her to come for the money to-morrow, the day after ; meantime more purchases were made, and when it came to a reckoning, the house-mistress could not remember if she hadn't already paid for the day before yesterday's quarter of a pound of butter—and she “ put it aside ” to ask her husband about it, who was there at the time—he has a tenacious memory, and will certainly remember how it was. Next morning it turns out the husband came home too late from the house-of-study, and she forgot to ask him. On the third day she says, with a pleased expression, that she asked her husband about it, and he was angry with her for bothering him, “ as if he had nothing better to do than attend to the affairs of a couple of women ; ” and it is settled that she, the madam, shall try to remember herself.

Presently she begins to feel sure the butter was included in the account after all ; a little later, she is ready to build on it ; and when poor mother reminded her of the butter again, she was called a pert hussy, who was trying to get an extra gulden by trickery—and she was assured that if they heard any more about the butter, she need never show herself there again.

Mother, who was herself the daughter of well-to-do parents, and would have been a lady herself, were it not for the nobleman who took her dowry, could not accept

this meekly. She frequently came home with swollen eyelids, threw herself on the bed with a burst of tears, and lay there weeping bitterly till her heart was eased, when she stood up and cooked us Kliskelech<sup>1</sup> with beans.

At other times she vented her anger on us; that is, on me; she never scolded the sick Beril, and the other boys only very seldom—they, poor things, used to come home from Cheder with their cheeks pinched brown and blue and with swollen under-lids; I, on the other hand, came in for many an undeserved tweak to my hair or else a slap.

“You were not so sick all this time, but you could have laid the fire, put on a kettleful of water, were you?” And if I *had* done it, I caught it worse: “Look at my fine lady! Goes and makes a fire and lets the wood burn away for nothing and nobody—never a thought of me toiling all day! She’ll be the ruin of us!”

Sometimes when father was at work in the woods, mother would sit down on the bed with her face to the window and complain, as she stared before her: “What does he care! There he sits out in the woods like a lord, breathes fresh air, lies about on the grass, eats sour milk, perhaps even cream, how do I know? and here am I, skin and bone!”

And with all that, those were good days. We never knew want, and after a week of little worries came a cheerful, or at all events a peaceful, Sabbath. Father

<sup>1</sup> Small lumps of dough dropped into the soup while it is cooking.

often came home for it, and mother was busy all about the house and smiled to herself in secret.

Friday evening, just before blessing the candles, she would often kiss me on the head. I knew what that meant. Because if it so happened that father did *not* come home, then I was an idle hussy. Even when mother pulled out half my hair while combing it, and gave me a few slaps on the shoulders besides, I didn't cry. My childish heart felt that it was not *me* she meant, but her unhappy fate. When the wood was all cut down, my father stayed at home, and then food began to grow scarce. It was my father, my mother, and myself, really, who hadn't enough; the other children knew very little about it. Beril wanted next to nothing—took a cup of porridge when it was given him, and stared all the time at the ceiling. The other poor children had to go to Cheder, "they *must* have something hot," but I often went hungry.

Father and mother were always recalling by-gone days with tears in their eyes. I, on the contrary, was happier in the bad times than I had been in the good. Now that bread was often lacking in the house, I received a double portion of my mother's love; she never pulled a hair out of my head when combing it, or hit my thin bones; my father would stroke my head at supper and play with me, so that I should not observe the smallness of my share of food; and I was quite proud whenever there came a fast, because I fasted with my parents, like a grown-up girl.

It was about that time that Beril died. It happened this way: Mother woke up one morning and said to

father across the bed: "Do you know, Beril must be better; he has slept the whole night through."

I heard it—I have always been a light sleeper—sprang joyfully from my bed on the chest, and ran to look at my "pet of a brother" (that is how I called him—I was so fond of him). I hoped to see a smile on the wan little face, such as came over it once a year—but it was a dead face I saw.

There was a week's mourning.

After that my father's health failed, and the Røfeh began to come to the house.

So long as there was money to pay his fee, the old Røfeh came in person; later on, when all the bed-clothes and the hanging-lamp, with father's book-case, which for a while my mother wouldn't touch, had gone in medicines, the Røfeh began to send his "boy," the assistant.

The "boy" displeased my mother dreadfully; he had merely a suspicion of pointed whiskers, was dressed like a Gentile, and was continually introducing Polish words into his speech.

I was afraid of him, to this day I don't know why. But when I knew he was to come, I ran and hid in the yard, and waited there till he had gone.

One day a neighbor fell ill, also a poor man, and one whose furniture had apparently gone, too, and the "boy" (to this day I don't know what his name was) went to him straight from our house. Crossing the yard, he found me sitting on a log.

I looked down. Aware of his approach, I felt a chill run through me, and my heart began to beat faster.

He came up to me, took me by the chin, lifted my face and said:

"A pretty girl like you ought not to have untidy hair! And she ought not to be ashamed before any lad in the world."

He let me go, and I ran into the house. I felt that all the blood had rushed into my face at once. I squeezed into the darkest corner behind the stove, under pretense of counting the soiled linen. That was on a Wednesday.

On Friday, for the first time, I reminded my mother of my own accord that my head needed washing, that it was frowzy.

"More shame to me!" exclaimed my mother, wringing her hands. "I haven't combed her hair these three weeks."

Suddenly she grew angry: "Lazy thing!" she cried; "a great girl like you and not able to comb her own hair! Another at your age would have washed the other children."

"Sarah'le, don't scream," begged father; but her anger only grew more violent.

"Lazy girl, you *shall* comb your own hair, and this minute. Do you hear?"

But I was afraid to go to the fire-place, where the hot water stood, because I had to pass mother, who would have given me a slap. Father saved me, as usual.

"Sarah'le," he moaned, "don't scream, my head does ache so."

That was enough. My mother's anger vanished. I ran freely across the room to the hot water.

As I awkwardly combed my hair, I saw my mother go up to my father and point at me with a heavy sigh:

"Lord of the world, the poor child grows taller every

day," she whispered to my father, but my ears caught every word. "Fine as gold—and what's to be done with her?"

Father answered with a still heavier sigh.

The Rōfeh assured us several times that father had nothing serious the matter with him. Worry of mind had gone to his liver, and this had swollen and pressed against the heart; nothing worse. He was to drink milk and not trouble any more, walk out into the street, talk with his friends, and find something to do; but father said his feet refused to carry him. Why, I only knew later.

Early one summer morning I was awakened by the following conversation between my parents:

"Did you knock yourself up in the woods?" asked my mother.

"Look's like it," answered my father. "They were cutting down in twenty places at once. You see, the wood is the nobleman's, but the peasants have certain privileges;<sup>1</sup> they get the twigs that fall and lie about on the ground, and the wood of any tree that is struck by lightning. Well, when the trees are cut down they lose their privileges, and have to buy wood for building and for heating purposes. So, of course, they wanted to stop it and bring down a commissioner. But they set about it too late. Reb Zeinwill no sooner saw them scratching their heads than he gave orders to put on forty axes. It was a Gehenna! They were felling in perhaps twenty different places, and one had to be everywhere. Well,

<sup>1</sup> *Servituty*. These are of different kinds.

what could you expect? My feet swelled like toadstools."

"Sinner that I am," sighed my mother. "And there was I fancying you had nothing to do."

"Nothing at all," my father smiled sadly; "I was only on my feet from dawn to dark."

"And three rubles a week wages," added my mother, angrily.

"He consented to raise them; meanwhile, you know, the timber raft was sunk, and he told me he was a poor man."

"And you believe it?"

"It may be."

"He is always saying that" (angrily), "and yet the fortune goes on increasing."

"With God's help," sighed father.

There was silence for a while.

"Do you know what he is doing now?" asked father, who had scarcely left the house for a year.

"What should he? He trades in flax and eggs; he has a public-house."

"And she?"

"Sick, poor thing."

"A pity; she was a good woman."

"A jewel. The only lady who was not allowed to put up a groschen's worth of preserves! *She* would have paid me regularly, but she hadn't much to say in the matter."

"I fancy she is his third wife," said my father.

"She is," my mother agreed.

"Well, Sarah, here we have a rich Jew, one who

might live comfortably, and, lo and behold, he has no luck with his wives—we all have our troubles.”

“Such a young woman, too,” said my mother; “not more than two or three and twenty.”

“There’s no accounting for these things; he must be seventy, and he’s solid as iron.”

“You don’t say so.”

“And no spectacles.”

“And when he walks, he shakes the planks.”

“And here am I in bed.”

These last words gave me a pang.

“God will help,” mother consoled him.

“Only she—she—,” sighed my mother, and glanced toward my box, “she is growing taller and taller, do you see?”

“Of course, I see!”

“And a face—bright as the sun.”

There is a silence.

“Sarah’le, we are not doing our duty.”

“In what respect?”

“In respect to her. How old were you when you married?”

“I was younger than she is.”

“Well?”

“Well—what?”

At that moment there were two raps at the shutter.

Mother sprang out of bed; in one minute she had torn down the string by which the shutter was held to, and thrown open the window, which had long been without a fastening.

“What is it?” she called into the street.

"Rebekah Zeinwill is dead!"

Mother left the window.

"Blessed be the righteous Judge!" said my father.  
"To die is nothing."

"Blessed be the righteous Judge!" said my mother.  
"We were just talking about her."

---

I was very restless in those days. I don't know myself what ailed me.

Sometimes I would lie awake all night. Hammers beat in my temples, and my heart pained me as though filled with fear, or else with a longing after something for which it had no name. At other times it grew so warm and tender, I could have taken everything and everyone round me in my arms and kissed them and hugged them.

Only whom? The little brothers wouldn't let me—even the five-year old Yochanan butted and screamed; he wouldn't play with a girl. My mother, besides my being afraid of her, was always cross and overdriven; my father—growing from bad to worse.

In a short time he was as gray as a pigeon, his face shrivelled like parchment, and his eyes had such a helpless, pleading stare, it needed only one glance at them to send me out of the room crying.

Then I used to think of Beril. I could have told him everything, I could have hugged and kissed him. Now he lay in the cold earth, and I cried more bitterly than ever.

Indeed, the tears often came without any reason at all.

Sometimes I would be looking out of the window into the yard and see the moon swimming nearer and nearer to the whitewashed fence opposite, and not able to swim over it.

And I would be seized with pity for the moon and feel a sudden contraction of the heart, and the tears flowed and flowed.

Other days I was listless. I hung round with no energy and a pale face with drooping eyelids. There was a rushing in my ears, my head was heavy, and life seemed so little worth living, it would be best to die.

At these times I envied Beril his lot. He lay in the earth, where it is quiet.

And I often dreamt that I was dead; that I lay in the grave, or else that I was flying about in heaven in a shift with my hair loose, and that I looked down to see what people were about on the earth.

Just about then I lost all the companions with whom I used to play at marbles in days gone by, and they were not replaced. One of them already went out on Sabbath with a satin skirt and a watch and chain. It was soon to be her wedding. Others were "Kallah-Mädlich";<sup>1</sup> match-makers and future fathers-in-law were "breaking in the doors," and there was combing and washing and dressing, when I was still going barefoot, in an old bodice and a short skirt and a faded cotton waist, which had burst in several places right in front, and which I had patched with calico of a different color. The "Kallah-Mädlich" avoided me, and I was ashamed to

<sup>1</sup> Bride-maidens—girls of marriageable age.

play with younger children; besides, marbles amused me no longer. So I never showed myself in the street by day. Mother never sent me out on errands, and one day when I intended to go somewhere, she prevented me. I often used to slip out after dark, and walk about behind the house near the barns, or else sit down beside the river.

In summer time, I sat there till quite late at night.

Some evenings, mother would come out after me. She never came up to me, but would stand in the gateway, look round—and I could almost hear the sigh she gave as she watched me in the distance.

That also came to an end in time; I would sit by myself there for hours, listening to the noise of the little mill stream, watching the frogs jump out of the grass into the water, or following a cloud through the sky.

At times I would fall half asleep with my eyes open.

One evening I heard a melancholy song. The voice was young and fresh, and yet the song thrilled me with emotion; it was a Jewish song.

"That is the Röfeh-boy singing," I said to myself. "Another would have sung hymns, not a song."

I also said to myself that one should go indoors, so as not to hear it or meet the Röfeh-boy, and yet I remained sitting; I was in a dreamy state, with no energy to move, and I sat on, though my heart was beating anxiously.

The song drew nearer; it was coming from the opposite bank—across the bridge.

Already I hear steps in the sand, I want to run away, but my limbs are disobedient, and I remain sitting.

At last he comes to the spot where I am.

"Is it you, Leah?"

I do not answer.

The noise in my ears is louder than ever, the hammering in my temples, busier, and it seems to me the kindest and sweetest voice I ever heard.

My not answering matters little to him, he sits down beside me on the log, and looks me straight in the face.

I do not *see* his look, because I dare not raise my eyes, but I feel how it is scorching me.

"You are a pretty girl, Leah," he says, "it's a pity to hide yourself."

A dreadful crying fit seizes hold of me, and I run away.

The next evening I stayed at home, and the one after. On the third, Friday night, my heart was so heavy, I *had* to go out—I felt I should suffocate indoors. He was apparently waiting for me in the shadow round a corner of the house, for hardly had I sat down in my accustomed place when he stood before me as though he had grown out of the ground.

"Don't run away from me, Leah," he begged gently. "Believe me, I will do you no harm."

His gentle, earnest voice touched me. Then he began to sing a low, sad song, and again the tears came into my eyes. I could not keep them back, and began to cry quietly.

"Why are you crying, Leah," he broke off, and took my hand.

"You sing so sadly," I answered, and withdrew my hand from his.

"I am an orphan," he said, "unhappy—among strangers."

Someone appeared in the street and we fled in different directions.

I learned the song and used to hum it softly over to myself in bed; I went to sleep with it, and I rose with it next morning. And yet I frequently had remorse, and cried because I had made acquaintance with a Röfeh-boy who dressed German fashion and shaved his chin. Had he dressed like the old Röfeh, had he at least been pious! I knew that if my father heard of it, the grief would kill him; my mother would do herself a mischief, and the secret lay on my heart like a stone.

I go up to my father's bed to hand him something, and my mother comes in from the street, and my sin overwhelms me, so that hands and feet shake, and all the color goes from my face. And yet every night I consented to come out again the next, and I felt no desire to run away from him now. He never took my hand again and told me I was a pretty girl. He only talked with me, taught me songs; but one day he brought me a bit of St. John's Bread.

"Eat it, Leah."

I wouldn't take it.

"Why not?" he asked sadly. "Why will you not take anything from me?"

I blurted out that I would rather have a piece of bread.

---

How long our sitting together and singing lasted, I don't know.

But one day he came sadder than usual; I saw it in his face and asked him what was the matter.

"I have to go."

"Where to?" I asked faintly.

"To the recruiting station."

I caught hold of his hand.

"You are going into the army?"

"No," he replied, and pressed my fingers, "I am not strong. I suffer from the heart. I shall not be taken for a soldier, but I must present myself."

"Shall you come back?"

"Of course!"

We are both silent.

"It will only be for a few weeks," he said.

I was silent, and he looked at me pleadingly.

"Shall you miss me?"

"Yes." I scarcely heard my own reply.

Another silence.

"Let us say good-bye."

My hand still lay in his.

"Go in health," I said in a trembling voice.

He leaned over, kissed me, and vanished.

I stood there a long time like one tipsy.

"Leah!" It was mother's voice, but the old, gentle, almost singing voice of the days when father was well.

"Leah'she!"

I had not been called that for a long time. One more quiver, and I ran indoors with lips still burning from his kiss. I scarcely recognized the room. On the table stood two strange candle-sticks with lighted candles, and beside them, brandy and gingerbread. Father was sitting on a chair propped up with cushions, joy smiling out of every wrinkle in his face. And round the table were strange chairs with strange people—and mother caught me in her arms and kissed me.

"Good luck to you, daughter, my little daughter, Leah'she! good luck to you!"

I don't understand, but I am frightened, and my heart beats wildly. When my mother let me loose, my father called me. I had no strength to stand, and I dropped on my knees beside him, and laid my head in his lap. He stroked my head, curled my hair with his fingers.

"My child you will never suffer want and hunger again, you will never go barefoot—you will be a lady—you will be rich—you will pay for the teaching of your little brothers—so that they shall not be turned out of the Cheder—you will help *us*, too—I shall get well."

"And do you know who the suitor is?" asked mother, excitedly. "Reb Zeinwill! fancy, Reb Zeinwill! He sent the match-maker himself."

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I don't know what happened to me, but I woke to find myself on my bed in broad daylight.

"God be praised!" cried my mother.

"Praised be His dear Name!" said my father.

And they continued to embrace and kiss me. They even offered me preserves. . . . Would I like syrup in water? . . . Perhaps a sip of wine?

I shut my eyes again, and was choked with a terrible fit of crying.

"Never mind, never mind," said my mother, joyfully. "Poor child, let her have her cry out. It is our fault for telling her the good news all at once, so suddenly. She might have burst a vein, which heaven for-

bid. But God be praised! Yes, cry your heart out. May all sorrow swim away with the tears, and a new life begin for you—a new life.”

Man has two angels, a good and a bad, and I felt convinced that the good angel bade me forget my Röfeh-boy, eat Reb Zeinwill's preserves, drink his syrup in water, and dress at his expense, while the bad angel urged me to tell my parents, once and for all, that I would not consent, that on no account would I consent.

I did not know Reb Zeinwill, unless I had seen him once and then forgotten—or else not known who it was—but I disliked him.

The second night I dreamed that I stood under the wedding canopy.

The bridegroom is Reb Zeinwill, and they lead me round him seven times, but my feet are as if paralyzed, and they carry me in their hands.

Then I am taken home.

My mother comes to meet me with a cake, and they are bringing the golden broth.<sup>1</sup>

I am afraid to raise my eyes. I feel sure I shall see before me a blind man, both eyes gone, with a dreadfully long nose—a cold shudder runs through me—but someone whispers in my ear:

“Leah, what a pretty girl you are!” And the voice is not that of an old man; it is *his* voice. I open my eyes a little way; it is *his* face: “Sst!” he whispers; “don't tell! I enticed Reb Zeinwill into the wood, put him into a sack, tied it up, and threw it into the river

<sup>1</sup> Thick chicken soup with balls of flour.

(this was out of a story my mother once told me), and I am here in his place!"

I woke trembling.

Pale moonshine was lighting the whole room through a chink in the shutter, and I noticed, for the first time, that the lamp was once more hanging from the ceiling, and that my parents were sleeping in bed-clothes. Father smiled in his sleep; mother breathed quietly, and the good angel said to me:

"If you are obedient and pious, your father will recover his health; your mother will not have to toil into her old age, and your little brothers will become learned men—rabbis, authorities in the Law, great, great Jews. Their school fees will be paid."

"Only," put in the bad angel, "Reb Zeinwill will kiss you with his damp whiskers, and clasp you in his bony arms; and he will torment you as he did the other wives, and send you to an early grave, and *he* will come back and grieve, and he will teach you no more songs, or sit with you evening after evening—you will be sitting with Reb Zeinwill!"

No! not if the heavens should fall about the earth! Tear up the contract!

I did not sleep again till morning. My mother was the first to wake. I wanted to talk with her, but I was accustomed to go for help to my father.

There, he wakes.

"Do you know, Sarah'le," are his first words, "I feel so well to-day. You will see, I shall go out."

"Praise to His dear Name! It is all owing to our daughter's good fortune, all thanks to her merit."

"And the Rofeh was quite right: the milk agrees very well with me."

They are silent, and the good angel repeats:

"If you are good and pious, your father will get well, while if your lips let fall wicked words, he will decline and die."

"Listen, Sarah'le," continued my father, "you are not to go about peddling any more."

"What do you mean?"

"What I say! I will go to-day to Reb Zeinwill; he will take me into a business, or lend me a few rubles, and we will have a little shop; I will serve a bit, and you a bit—and later I will deal in produce."

"God grant it."

"He *will* grant it. If you want a dress for the wedding, buy it—even *two* dresses. Why not? He said we were to get what we wanted. You are not going in your old clothes?"

"Go along with you! The thing is to have something made for the children. Reuben has been going barefoot—last week he got a splinter in his sole, and he is limping now. Winter is coming on, too, they want coats and shirts and warm cloaks."

"Buy, buy!"

"You hear?" said the good angel. "If you speak out, your mother will have no new dress, and you know the old one is falling to bits; the little brothers will run barefoot to Cheder in the sharpest frost, and in summer they will get splinters in their soles."

"I tell you what it is," said my mother, "everything ought to be talked over and settled in detail, because he

is not a *very* good man. Whatever settlement he intends to make on her ought to be put down in writing. There will be any quantity to inherit. Even if it isn't a deed, let him give a written promise, because how long is such a one likely to live? Another year or so!"

"One can live a long time in comfort!" sighed my father.

"A long time! Remember, he's seventy, and sometimes he looks dead behind his ears."

And the bad angel whispered: "If you keep silence, you will marry a dead man; you will live with a corpse; they will lead you to the bridal chamber with a lifeless body."

Mother sighed.

"Everything is in God's hands," said my father.

Mother sighed again, and father said:

"And what could we do? Anything better? If I only could have gotten well, and earned something, and we had had at least dry bread in the house——"

He broke off; I had a feeling that something wept within him.

"If she had been a year or two younger, I would have risked it all—perhaps even bought lottery tickets."

And I said nothing.

---

My seventy-year-old bridegroom gave my father a few hundred gulden for clothes for the wedding, and me a check for one hundred and fifty gulden.

People said, "A fine match."

I recovered my companions. The one with the satin

skirt and the watch and chain came two or three times a day.

She was the happiest creature in the world, because I had caught her up, and we were to be married in the same month. I had others, but this one stuck to me like a leech. The others were "common girls, there was no saying how long they wouldn't have to wait!"

Rivkah's *fiancé* was a stranger, but she was to board at home for two or three years. During that time we would be close friends; she would run in to me for chicory-coffee; I to her on Sabbath, after the mid-day rest, for chicken-broth and pear cider.

"And when I am expecting a baby," said Rivkah once, and her face shone, "you will come and sit by me?"

I made no reply.

"Well," exclaimed Rivkah, "why so sad? There's no saying but you, too . . . . Cheer up!" she went on, "if God will, one can fire off a broom. Besides, how long do you suppose it will last? No one can live forever. My word, what a young widow you will make, to be sure. Won't you be run after!"

Rivkah wished Reb Zeinwill no harm.

"To be sure, he's a wretch; he tormented that other woman; but she was sickly, and you are sound as a nut. He will treat *you* well enough."

---

He came back!

My father was better, but he fancied a little dry-cupping—he was afraid, otherwise, of going out. He felt that after lying down so long, and then sitting for so

many weeks on end, the blood had all settled in one place, and should be stirred. Also his shoulders ached, and dry-cupping is the sovereign remedy for that.

I shook as with ague. When there was dry-cupping to be done, the "boy" came, not the Röfeh himself.

"Will you go and fetch the Röfeh?" asked my father.

"The idea!" exclaimed my mother. "A Kallah-Mädel!"

She went herself.

"Why have you grown so pale?" asked my father, in alarm.

"Nothing."

"It's some days now," he persisted.

"You imagine it, Tate."<sup>1</sup>

"Your mother says the same."

"Eh!"

"To-day"—father wanted to cheer me up—"they are coming to measure you for the wedding dress."

I was silent.

"Aren't you pleased?" he asked.

"Why shouldn't I be?"

"You don't even know *what* they are making you!"

"But they've measured me once already."

Hereupon my mother came in with the Röfeh himself.

I felt relieved, and yet all the time something mourned within me: "Perhaps you will never see him again."

"What a world it is!" Thus the Röfeh coming in panting and groaning. "Reb Zeinwill marries a young

<sup>1</sup> Father.

girl, and the treasurer's Leezerl has turned ascetic and run away from his wife."

"Leezerl!" cried mother, in astonishment.

"As I tell you; and here am I at sixty about early and late, and my assistant goes to bed."

I began to tremble again.

"Don't keep such a Gentile!" said my mother.

"A Gentile?" said the Röfeh. "Why a Gentile?"

"What's all that to me?" interrupted father, impatiently. "You'd better set to work."

Father was naturally good-tempered; he always seemed to me incapable of hurting a fly, and yet his tone was so full of contempt for the Röfeh.

When he lay sick in bed, he was always glad if anyone came in to have a chat with him, but he could never get on with the Röfeh; he always interrupted him and told him to see to his own business, but this was the first time he had spoken so strongly. It pained me, because how much rougher would he not have been with the other, who was lying ill?

What is wrong with him?

He had said his heart was weak.

What that meant exactly, I did not know; it must be something for which one had to go to bed, and yet *my* heart told me that I had something to answer for in the matter.

That night I cried in my sleep; my mother woke me, and sat down beside me on my bed.

"Hush, my child," she said, "don't let us wake father." And our conversation was whispered into each other's ears.

I noticed that mother was greatly disturbed; she looked at me inquiringly, as though determined to get at the truth, and I resolved to say nothing, at all events so long as my father slept.

"My child, why have you been crying?"

"I don't know, mother."

"Do you feel well?"

"Yes, Mamishe; only sometimes my head aches."

She sat on my bed, leaning half way over, and I drew nearer her and laid my head on her breast.

"Mother," I asked, "why does your heart beat so loud?"

"For fear, Tochter'she."

"Are *you* afraid at night, too?"

"Night and day; I am afraid all the time."

"What for are you afraid?"

"I am afraid for you."

"For me?"

No reply, but I felt a warm tear fall on my face.

"Mother, *you* are crying now."

The tears fell faster.

I won't say! my resolve strengthened.

Suddenly she asked:

"Has Rivkah been telling you anything?"

"What about, mother?"

"About your intended?"

"How should *she* know him?"

"If she really knew him, she would hold her tongue. I only mean, did she repeat any gossip? Out of jealousy—when a rich man marries a young girl in his old age, people always talk. I don't know—has no one told you that his last wife died because of the life he led her?"

I answered coolly that I had heard something like it, but that I had forgotten from whom.

"I'm sure it was Rivkah—I wish her mouth were in the back of her head!" (angrily).

"Then why was it," I inquired, "that she died so suddenly?"

"Why? She had a weak heart."

"But—do people die of a weak heart?"

"Certainly." . . . .

Something seemed to snap inside my brain.

---

I became a "silken child," my praise was in everyone's mouth. Parents could not understand it—neither could the tailor: I asked for nothing; mother chose everything—material, color, and cut, just as she fancied.

Rivkah used to come in and pinch her own red cheeks.

"Who would trust a mother in matters of dress? An old-fashioned Jewess? You won't dare to show yourself on Sabbath either in Shool or in the street or anywhere else!

"You've done for yourself," she wound up.

It occurred to me that I had done for myself a long time, and I waited indifferently for the Sabbath of Consolation, when Reb Zeinwill was to be invited to supper.

Then there would follow the "calling up,"<sup>1</sup> and then the wedding.

Father was really better, he sometimes went out and began to inquire about produce. He thought it too soon

<sup>1</sup> Of the bridegroom in Shool to the Reading of the Law.

to speak to Reb Zeinwill about anything further; he intended to ask him on Sabbath to come again for the "third meal," and to put in a word for himself after that.

All being so well, it was time to dismiss the Rōfeh; there was no difficulty now about credit—he never reminded us of what was owing him, never sent the "boy," but came himself. Still, it was time this should end. I don't know how much they sent him, but the messenger was my brother Avremele, who was to leave the money on his way to Cheder.

But the "boy" appeared a few days later.

"How, wasn't it enough?" said my father, on seeing him.

"Yes, Reb Yehūdah; I have come to say good-bye."

"To me?" asked my father in surprise.

I had dropped down, when he came in, on the nearest chair, but at these words I stood up; it had flashed across me that I must protect him, not let him be insulted. He hadn't come for that.

"I used to come to see you at one time," he said, with his gentle, melancholy voice, which was like sweet oil to my heart, "now I am leaving for good, so I thought—"

"Well, well, certainly," replied father, quite politely. "Take a seat, young man. It was very nice of you to think of it, very nice, indeed."

"Daughter," he called to me, "we must offer him some refreshment."

He sprang up, pale, with quivering lips and burning eyes, but the next instant his face had taken on its old melancholy expression.

"No, Reb Yehùdah, I want nothing, thank you. Farewell!"

He put out his hand to no one, and barely gave me a glance.

And yet, in that one glance, I read that he reproached me, that he would never forgive me. For what? I hardly knew myself.

And again I fainted.

"The third time," I hear my mother say to my father. "It is of no consequence—at her age it often happens—but heaven forbid that Reb Zeinwill should hear of it. He would break off the match. He had enough of that with the last one—the invalid."

I was not an invalid. And I only fainted once more—on the wedding-day, when I saw Reb Zeinwill for the first time.

Never again.

Yesterday even, when the Rōfeh, who cuts my Reb Zeinwill's nails every month (otherwise they grow into his fingers), asked me, as he left, if I remembered his "boy," because he had died in a hospital in Warsaw—even then I didn't faint; I only shed one tear. And I was not aware of *that*, only it seemed to please the Rōfeh.

"You are a kind soul," he said, and then I felt it on my cheek.

Nothing more.

I am healthy; I have lived with Reb Zeinwill five years.

*How?* Perhaps I shall tell another time.



VI

THE SEVENTH CANDLE OF  
BLESSING



## VI

### THE SEVENTH CANDLE OF BLESSING

The thirteen-year-old brow is puckered with anguish, the child-face pale with dread, tear after tear falls from the innocent eyes. Only last Friday, just a week ago, she was so happy, so full of glee. It was the "short Friday."<sup>1</sup> Grandmother had woke her a little earlier than usual, she had spent the day in preparation for the Sabbath.

In the late afternoon she had washed herself, plaited her long hair, singing and dancing the while, dressed, and gone with grandmother to the synagogue—and they had lighted each her candles. Bashe's first candle—God bless grandmother! Her second—God bless Tatishe,<sup>2</sup> and let him find lots of work and make heaps of money, and not sigh any more and say that the times are bad. Her third—God bless Mamishe, and make her strong.

And then—for the little sisters and the little brothers, a candle each.

It lasted till people began to come in for the prayers. How she loves the synagogue! how she loves candle-blessing.

She has lived with grandmother two whole years.

She does not want to go home (there is no candle-

<sup>1</sup> The Friday nearest December 21.

<sup>2</sup> Diminutive of Tate = Father.

blessing there, it is not the custom), unless it were just to see her mother, to clasp her father once round the neck and play awhile with his black, silky beard, and to have a game with the little ones.

Grandmother must not be left alone. She is always so good to her; she has taught her to bless the candles.

Bashe loves grandmother, and blessing the candles, too. She longs for it the whole week through, she counts the days. But this is a miserable Friday.

In the morning everything was the same as usual.

She had "made Sabbath"; grandmother had sat there and watched her happily. They had dressed themselves, and grandmother had taken her stick. Then, as ill-luck would have it, there came the postman.

Grandmother read the letter, threw herself on the bed, and there she has lain for two hours with her face to the wall.

She is black as a coal, her eyes are shut; one hand holds the letter; she foams at the mouth.

No one is to come near her; no one is to be sent for.

Bashe is pushed away, and whenever she tries to open the door, grandmother hears and screams "No!"

Bashe stands by the bed and cannot make it out. Her heart beats wildly. God only knows what they have written from home. Perhaps—perhaps . . . .

She cannot think what has happened. She drops on to her knees and clutches convulsively at grandmother's hand:

"Granny, granny, what is it? Speak to me! Tell me—what is it? Granny, I think I shall die of fright!" She spoke involuntarily.

Grandmother has turned toward her; she moves her lips, opens her eyes, gives her one look, and

"Die!" she says in a hard voice, and turns her face once more to the wall. "And there wasn't his like!" she adds. "Die, Bashe, die!"

Bashe is silent. A blackness passes before her eyes, and her head falls on grandmother's feet. Within her all is dark and cold. She has ceased to puzzle herself, she is nearly unconscious.

And in this way another half-hour goes by.

She hears her grandmother's voice:

"Get up!"

Bashe obeys.

Grandmother has risen to her feet and taken up the stick which she previously had flung away.

"How many candles have you?" she asks.

"Why, eight," is the trembling reply.

"Leave one out!"

Bashe does not move.

"Put one away!" screams grandmother, angrily.

Bashe trembles like a leaf, but does not move.

The old woman has gone to the table herself, undone the packet of candles, taken out one, and tied the rest together again. She pushes them into Bashe's hands:

"Come along!"

Bashe follows her automatically; neither has thought to fasten the door behind her. Bashe does not know herself how she reached the platform with her candles.

"Light them one at a time, for whom I shall tell you. Repeat my words. Say: God bless Mamishe and grant her long life!"

Bashe shakes as with ague: the first candle has always been father's.

"Repeat!" screams grandmother.

Bashe does so.

"The second: God make Chaïmle a good Jew!"

Little Bashe shakes more and more—her limbs are giving way beneath her—she does not hear her father's name. Her heart thumps, her temples throb, her eyes burn.

Grandmother has no pity on her—she screams louder every time:

"Repeat, repeat what I say!"

Bashe is lighting the last candle.

"Say: God bless Sarah!" commands grandmother.

No—she will not say that—where is father? No, she cannot say it—her whole being is in revolt against her wicked grandmother—no, no, no!

"Repeat, repeat!" screams grandmother with increasing violence.

Bashe refuses to obey—the last light *must* be father's.

She begins: "God bless fa—"

"Hush!" in a terrible voice. "Hush, hush! Your father is no longer a Jew. He has become an official!"<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> No unbaptized Jew may become an official in the courts in Russia.

VII

THE WIDOW.



## VII

### THE WIDOW

The gray, swirling mists have rolled themselves together into one black cloud. It is warm and stifling; it is going to pour with rain; a few drops are falling already. The little house stands just under the hill. The low, thatched roof is full of holes—there is no one to mend it.

The clouds have hidden the sun, and the remaining light is intercepted by the hill.

Inside the hut it is nearly dark; it is late—night is falling.

In the corner, on the chimney-shelf, stands a little empty lamp, with a cracked globe; the naphthaline is exhausted, there is no one to go and buy more. It is closer indoors than out.

The fire-place is not empty, it boasts two or three broken earthenware pots, a handful of ashes, a fragment of polished slate, a little iron stand on legs, but not a spark of fire.

Outside the door lies a log of rotten wood; there is no one to chop it.

The owner of the hut lay sick for a whole year, and with every day of it their little hoard of money grew less. He had saved for a child's sake, "scraped together one hundred rubles, to be lent on interest." God gave a little girl: "It shall be her marriage portion!"

But there came the illness.

The little hoard dwindled and dwindled, and the man's strength likewise. The household goods were disposed of one after another; the last to go was the sewing-machine, and with the last penny out of the bag the soul departed out of the body.

The soiled shred of linen that held the money hangs across a glass of water beside the soul-light.<sup>1</sup>

A small, tin trunk stands near the door; it belongs to the servant-girl, who has just gone out to look for another situation.

The dismantled room is now all but dark; a few scattered wisps of straw shimmer on the floor; a nail-head stares here and there out of the four walls.

On the wall used to hang a looking-glass (it is not wanted now. If the widow were to see her reflection, she would be terrified). A Chanukah lamp (for whom should it be lighted?) and clothes used to hang there, too. They came and took each his own before he died.

In one corner stands a cradle; in the cradle lies a child, asleep. On the floor beside the cradle sits the newly-made widow.

The thin hands hang helpless, the heavy head rests on the cradle; the eyes, which look as if they had wept themselves out, stare fixedly at the ceiling.

You might suppose she was dead, that she neither felt nor remembered any longer. Her heart scarcely beats, her strength has left her.

And yet one thought is revolving ceaselessly in her brain; no other seems able to drive it away—it is not to be dislodged.

<sup>1</sup> For the soul of the dead, to wash and dry itself.

"Hannah," he had once said to her, "hand me the scissors."

He had no use for them just then, and he had given a little artful smile. What had he really wanted?

Did he wish me to go near to him? I was peeling potatoes. Did I give him the scissors? No; just then someone came in—but who? She cannot recollect, and goes puzzling herself—who?

The child sleeps on, and smiles; it is dreaming.



VIII

THE MESSENGER



## VIII

### THE MESSENGER

He is on the road, and his beard and coat-tails flutter in the wind.

Every few minutes he presses a hand to his left side—he feels a pang; but he will not confess to it—he tries to think he is only making sure of his leather letter-bag.

“If only I don’t lose the contract-paper and the money!” That is what he is so afraid of.

“And if it *does* hurt me, it means nothing. Thank God, I’ve got strength enough for an errand like this and to spare! Another at my years wouldn’t be able to do a verst,<sup>1</sup> while I, thanks to His dear Name, owe no one a farthing and earn my own living. God be praised, they trust me with money.

“If what they trust me with were my own, I shouldn’t be running errands at more than seventy years old; but if the Almighty wills it so—so be it.”

It begins to snow in thick flakes; he is continually wiping his face.

“I haven’t more than half a mile<sup>2</sup> to go now,” he thinks. “*O wa!* what is that to me? It is much nearer than further.” He turns his head. “One doesn’t even see the town-clock from here, or the convent, or the barracks; on with you, Shemaiah, my lad.”

<sup>1</sup> A verst is .663 of a mile.

<sup>2</sup> A Lithuanian mile = 5.56 English miles.

And Shemaiah tramps on through the wet snow; the old feet welter in and out. "Thank God, there is not much wind."

Much wind, apparently, meant a gale; the wind was strong enough and blew right into his face, taking his breath away with every gust; it forced the tears out of his old eyes, and they hurt him like pins; but then he always suffered from his eyes.

It occurred to him that he would spend his next earnings on road-spectacles—large, round ones that would cover his eyes completely.

"If God will," he thought, "I shall manage it. If I only had an errand to go every day, a long, long one. Thank God, I can walk any distance, and I should soon save up enough for the spectacles."

He is also in want of a fur coat of some sort, it would ease the oppression on his chest; but he considers that, meanwhile, he has a warm cloak.

"If only it does not tear, it is an excellent one." He smiles to himself. "No new-fangled spider-web for you. All good, old-fashioned sateen—it will outlast me yet. And it has no slit—that's a great point. It doesn't blow out like the cloaks they make nowadays, and it folds over ever so far in front.

"Of course," he thinks on, "a fur coat is better; it's warm—beautifully warm. But spectacles come first. A fur is only good for winter, and spectacles are wanted all the year round, because in summer, when there's a wind and it blows the dust into your eyes, it's worse than in winter."

And so it was settled; first spectacles and then a fur

coat. Please God, he would help to carry corn—that would mean four gulden.

And he tramped on, and the wet snow was blown into his face, the wind grew stronger, and his side pained him more than ever.

“If only the wind would change! And yet perhaps it’s better so, because coming back I shall feel more tired, and I shall have the wind in my back. Then it will be quite different. Everything will be done; I shall have nothing on my mind.”

He was obliged to stop a minute and draw breath; this rather frightened him.

“What is the matter with me? A Cantonist<sup>1</sup> ought to know something of the cold,” he thought sadly.

And he recalls his time of service under Nicholas, twenty-five years’ active service with the musket, beside his childhood as a Cantonist. He has walked enough in his life, marching over hill and dale, in snow and frost and every sort of wind. And what snows, what frosts! The trees would split, the little birds fall dead to the ground, and the Russian soldier marched briskly forward, and even sang a song, a *trepak*, a *komarinski*, and beat time with his feet.

The thought of having endured those thirty-five years of service, of having lived through all those hardships, all those snows, all those winds, all the mud, hunger, thirst, and privation, and having come home in health—

<sup>1</sup> A Jew taken from his home as a child, under Nicholas I, estranged from his family and his faith, and made to serve in the army.

the thought fills him with pride. He holds up his head and feels his strength renewed.

"Ha, ha, what is a bit of a frost like this to me? In Russia, well, yes, there it was something like."

He walks on, the wind has lessened a little, it grows darker, night is falling.

"Call that a day," he said to himself. "Well, I never," and he began to hurry, not to be overtaken by the night. Not in vain has he been so regularly to study in the Shool of a Sabbath afternoon—he knows that one should go out and come home again before the sun goes down.

He feels rather hungry. He has this peculiarity—that being hungry makes him cheerful. He knows appetite is a good sign; "his" traders, the ones who send him on errands, are continually lamenting their lack of it. He, blessed be His Name, has a good appetite; except when he is not up to the mark, as yesterday, when the bread tasted sour to him.

Why should it have been sour? Soldiers' bread? Once, perhaps, yes; but now? Phonye<sup>1</sup> bakes bread that any Jewish baker might be proud of, and he had bought a new loaf which it was a pleasure to cut; but he was not up to the mark, a chill was going through his bones.

But, praised be He whose Name he is not worthy to mention, that happens to him but seldom.

Now he is hungry, and not only that, but he has in his pocket a piece of bread and cheese; the cheese was

<sup>1</sup> Jewish name for the typical Russian.

given him by the trader's wife, may she live and be well. She is a charitable woman—she has a Jewish heart. If only she would not scold so, he thinks, she would be really nice. He recalls to mind his dead wife.

“There was my Shprintze Niepritshkes; she also had a good heart and was given to scolding. Every time I sent one of the children out into the world she wept like a beaver, although at home she left them no peace with her scolding tongue. And when a death happened in the family!” he went on remembering. “Why, she used to throw herself about on the floor whole days like a snake and bang her head with her fists.”

“One day she wanted to throw a stone at heaven.

“We see,” he thought, “how little notice God takes of a woman's foolishness. But with her there was no taking away the bier and the corpse. She slapped the women and tore the beards of the men.

“She was a fine woman, was Shprintze. Looked like a fly, and was strong, so strong. Yet she was a good woman—she didn't dislike *me* even, although she never gave me a kind word.

“She wanted a divorce—a divorce. Otherwise she would run away. Only, when was that?”

He remembers and smiles.

It was a long, long time ago; at that time the excise regulations were still in force, and he was a night watchman, and went about all night with an iron staff, so that no brandy should be smuggled into the town.

He knew what service was! To serve with Phonye was good discipline; he had had good teachers. It was a winter's morning before daybreak, he went to have his

watch relieved by Chaïm Yoneh—he is in the world of truth now—and then went home, half-frozen and stiff. He knocked at the door and Shprintze called out from her bed:

“Into the ground with you! I thought your dead body would come home some time!”

Oho! she is angry still, because of yesterday. He cannot remember what happened, but so it must be.

“Shut your mouth and open the door!” he shouts.

“I’ll open your head for you!” is the swift reply.

“Let me in!”

“Go into the ground, I tell you!”

And he turned away and went into the house-of-study, where he lay down to sleep under the stove. As ill-luck would have it, it was a charcoal stove, and he was suffocated and brought home like a dead man.

Then Shprintze was in a way! He could hear, after a while, how she was carrying on.

They told her it was nothing—only the charcoal.

No! she must have a doctor. She threatened to faint, to throw herself into the water, and went on screaming:

“My husband! My treasure!”

He pulled himself together, sat up, and asked quietly:

“Shprintze, do you want a divorce?”

“May you be—” she never finished the curse, and burst into tears. “Shemaiah, do you think God will punish me for my cursing and my bad temper?”

But no sooner was he well again, there was the old Shprintze back. A mouth on wheels, a tongue on screws, and strong as iron—she scratched like a cat—ha,

ha! A pity she died; and she did not even live to have pleasure in her children.

"They must be doing well in the world—all artisans—a trade won't let a man die of hunger. All healthy—they took after me. They don't write, but what of that? They can't do it themselves, and just *you* go and ask someone to do it for you! Besides, what's the good of a letter of that kind? It's like watered soup. And then young boys, in a long time they forget. They *must* be doing well.

"But Shprintze is dead and buried. Poor Shprintze!

"Soon after the excise offices were abolished, she died. That was before I had got used to going errands and saying to the gentle folk 'your lordship,' instead of 'your high nobility';<sup>1</sup> before they trusted me with contracts and money—and we used to want for bread.

"I, of course, a man and an ex-Cantonist, could easily go a day without food, but for her, as I said, it was a matter of life and death. A foolish woman soon loses her strength; she couldn't even scold any more; all the monkey was out of her; she did nothing but cry.

"I lost all pleasure in life—she grew somehow afraid to eat, lest I shouldn't have enough.

"Seeing she was afraid, I grew bold, *I* screamed, *I* scolded. For instance: 'Why don't you go and eat?' Now and then I went into a fury and nearly hit her, but how are you to hit a woman who sits crying with her hands folded and doesn't stir? I run at her with a clenched fist and spit at it, and she only says: 'You go

<sup>1</sup> Addressing them in Polish instead of Russian.

and eat first—and then *I* will,’ and I had to eat some of the bread first and leave her the rest.

“Once she fooled me out into the street: ‘*I will* eat, only *you* go into the street—perhaps you will earn something,’ and she smiled and patted me.

“I go and I come again, and find the loaf much as I left it. She told me she couldn’t eat dry bread—she must have porridge.”

He lets his head drop as though beneath a heavy weight, and the sad thoughts chase one another:

“And what a wailing she set up when I wanted to pawn my Sabbath cloak—the one I’m wearing now. She moved heaven and earth, and went and pawned the metal candle-sticks, and said the blessing over candles stuck into potatoes to the day of her death. Before dying she confessed to me that she had never really wanted a divorce; it was only her evil tongue.

“‘My tongue, my tongue,’ she cried, ‘God forgive me my tongue!’ And she really died in terror lest in the other world they should hang her by the tongue.

“‘God,’ she said to me, ‘will never forgive me; I’ve been too great a sinner. But when *you* come—not soon, heaven forbid, but in over a hundred and twenty years<sup>1</sup>—when you *do* come, then remember and take me down from the gallows, and tell the Heavenly Council that *you* forgave me.’

“She began to wander soon after that, and was continually calling the children. She fancied they were

<sup>1</sup>“When you are a hundred and twenty years old”—the ideal age for the Jew, the age reached by Moses.

there in the room, that she was talking to them, and she asked their pardon.

"Silly woman, who wouldn't have forgiven her!

"How old was she altogether? Perhaps fifty. To die so young! It was worse than a person taking his own life, because every time a thing went out at the door, to the pawn-shop, a bit of her health and strength went with it.

"She grew thinner and yellower day by day, and said she felt the marrow drying up in her bones; she knew that she would die.

"How she loved the room and all its furniture! Whatever had to go, whether it were a chair or a bit of crockery or anything else, she washed it with her tears, and parted from it as a mother from her child; put her arms around it and nearly kissed it. 'Oho!' she would say, 'when I come to die, you won't be there in the room.'

"Well, there; every woman is a fool. At one moment she's a Cossack in petticoats, and the next weaker than a child; because, really, whether you die with a chair or without a chair, what does it matter?

"*Phê*," he interrupted himself, "what shall I think of next? Fancy letting one's thoughts wander like that, and my pace has slackened, too, thanks to the rubbish!

"Come, soldier's feet, on with you!" he commanded.

He looks round—snow on every hand; above, a gray sky with black patches—just like my under-coat, he thought, stuff patched with black sateen. Lord of the world, is it for want of "credit" up there, too?

Meanwhile it is freezing. His beard and whiskers are

ice. His body is fairly comfortable and his head is warm, he even feels the drops of sweat on his forehead; only his feet grow colder and weaker.

He has not walked so very far, and yet he would like to rest, and he feels ashamed of himself. It is the first time he ever wanted to rest on an errand of two miles. He will not confess to himself that he is a man of nearly eighty, and his weariness not at all surprising.

No, he must walk on—just walk on—for so long as one walks, one is walking, one gets on; the moment one gives way to temptation and rests, it's all over with one.

One might easily get a chill, he says to frighten himself, and does all he can to shake off the craving for rest.

"It isn't far now to the village; there I shall have time to sit down.

"That's what I'll do. I won't go straight to the nobleman—one has to wait there for an hour outside; I'll go first to the Jew.

"It's a good thing," he reflected, "that I am not afraid of the nobleman's dog. When they let him loose at night, it's dreadful. I've got my supper with me, and he likes cheese. It will be better to go first and get rested. I will go to the Jew and warm myself, and wash, and eat something."

His mouth waters at the thought; he has had nothing to eat since early this morning; but that's nothing, he doesn't mind if he is hungry; it is a proof that one is alive. Only his feet!

Now he has only two versts more to walk, he can see the nobleman's great straw-covered shed, only his *feet* cannot see it, and they want to rest.

"On the other hand," he mused, "supposing I rested a little after all? One minute, half a minute? Why not? Let us try. My feet have obeyed me so long, for once I'll obey them."

And Shemaiah sits down by the road-side on a little heap of snow. Now for the first time he becomes aware that his heart is beating like a hammer and his whole head perspiring.

He is alarmed. Is he going to be ill? And he has other people's money on him. He might faint! Then he comforts himself: "God be praised, there is no one coming, and if anyone came, it would never occur to him that I have money with me—that I am trusted with money. Just a minute, and then on we go."

But his lids are heavy as lead.

"No, get up, Shemaiah, *vstavai!*"<sup>1</sup> he commands.

He can still give a command, but he cannot carry it out; he cannot move. Yet he imagines he is walking, and that he is walking quicker and quicker. Now he sees all the little houses—that is Antek's, yonder, Basili's, he knows them all, he hires conveyances of them. It is still a long way to the Jew's. Yet, best to go there first—he may find Mezumen,<sup>2</sup> and it seems to him that he approaches the Jew's house; but it moves further and further on—he supposes that so it must be. There is a good fire in the chimney, the whole window is cheery and red; the stout Mir'l is probably skimming a large potful of potatoes, and she always gives him one. What

<sup>1</sup> Get up! Russian.

<sup>2</sup> Three men necessary for a certain form of grace.

so nice as a hot potato? And on he trudges, or—so he thinks, for in reality he has not left his place.

The frost has lessened its grip, and the snow is falling in broad, thick flakes.

He seems to be warmer, too, in his cloak of snow, and he fancies that he is now inside the Jew's house. Mir'l is straining the potatoes, he hears the water pouring away—*ziùch, ziùch, ziùch*—and so it drips, indeed, off his sateen cloak. Yoneh walks round and hums in his beard; it is a habit of his to sing after evening prayer, because then he is hungry and says frequently: "Well, Mir'l!"

But Mir'l never hurries—"more haste, worse speed."

"Am I asleep and is it a dream?" He is seized with joyful surprise. He thinks he sees the door open and let in his eldest son. Chonoh, Chonoh! Oh, he knows him well enough. What is he doing here? But Chonoh does not recognize *him*, and Shemaiah keeps quiet. Ha, ha, ha; he is telling Yoneh that he is on his way to see his father; he inquires after him; he has not forgotten; and Yoneh, sly dog, never tells him that his father is sitting there on the sleeping-bench. Mir'l is busy; she is taken up with the potatoes; she won't stop in her work; she only smiles and mashes the potatoes with the great wooden spoon—and smiles.

*Ach!* Chonoh must be rich, very rich! Everything he has on is whole, and he wears a chain—perhaps it is pinchbeck? No, it is real gold! Chonoh wouldn't wear a pinchbeck chain. Ha, ha, ha! he glances at the stove.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Pièkalik—built on to the stove.

Ha, ha, ha! he nearly splits with laughter. Yainkil, Beril, Zecharyah—all three—ha, ha, ha! they were hidden on the stove. The thieves! What a pity Shprintze is not there! What a pity! She would have been so pleased. Meantime Chonoh is ordering two geese. "Chonoh! Chonoh! don't you know me? I am he!" And he fancies they embrace him.

"Look you, Chonoh; what a pity your mother cannot see you! Yainkil, Beril, Zecharyah, come down from the stove! I knew you at once! Make haste! I knew you would come! Look, I have brought you some cheese, real sheep's milk cheese. Don't you like soldier's bread? What? Perhaps not? Yes, it is a pity about the mother."

And he fancies that all the four children have put their arms round him and hold him and kiss and press him to them.

"Gently, children, gently; don't squeeze me too hard! I am no young man—I am eighty years old! Gently, you are suffocating me; gently, children! Old bones! Gently, there is money in the bag. Praise God, they trust me with money! Enough, children, enough!"

And it was enough. He sat there suffocated, with his hand pressed to the bag in his bosom.



IX

WHAT IS THE SOUL?



## IX

### WHAT IS THE SOUL?

#### 1

I remember, as in a dream, that there used to be about the house a little, thin Jew, with a pointed beard, who often put his arms round me and kissed me.

Then I remember how the same man lay ill in bed; he groaned a great deal, and my mother stood and beat her head with her hands.

One night I woke up and saw the room full of people. Outside there was a grievous noise; I was very frightened, and I began to scream.

One of the people came up to me, dressed me, and led me away to sleep at a neighbor's.

When I saw our room next morning, I did not know it again. Straw lay scattered on the floor, the glass on the wall was covered over, the hanging-lamp wrapped in a table cover, and my mother sat on a low stool in her socks.

She began to weep loudly at sight of me and cried: "The orphan! the orphan!"

An oil-lamp burned in the window; beside it were a glass of water and a piece of linen.

They told me that my father had died, that his soul washed itself in the glass and dried itself with the linen; that when once I began to say the Kaddish it would fly straight up into heaven.

And I fancied the soul was a bird.

## 2

One evening the "helper" was leading me home from Cheder. A few birds flew past me, quite low.

"Neshome'lech fliehen, neshome'lech fliehen!"<sup>1</sup> I sang to myself. The "helper" turned round upon me:

"You silly!" he said, "those are birds, ordinary birds."

Afterwards I asked my mother how one could tell the difference between an ordinary bird and a soul.

## 3

At fourteen years old, I was studying Gemoreh with the commentaries, and, as luck would have it, under Zerach Kneip.

To this day I don't know if that was his real name, or whether the boys gave it him because he used to pinch (*kneipen*) without mercy.

And he did not wait till one had deserved a pinch; he gave it in advance. "Remind me," he would say, "and by and by we shall settle up our accounts."

He was a Mohel, and had one pointed, uncut finger nail, and every pinch went to the heart.

And he used to say: "Don't cry; don't cry about nothing! I only pinch your body! What is it to you if the worms have less to eat when you are in your grave?"

"The body," said Zerach Kneip, "is dust. Rub one palm against the other, and you will see."

And we tried, and saw for ourselves that the body is dust and ashes.

<sup>1</sup> Little souls fly, little souls fly!

"And what is the soul?" I asked.

"A spirit," answered the rabbi.

## 4

Zerach Kneip hated his wife like poison; but his daughter Shprintze was the apple of his eye.

We hated Shprintze, because she told on us, and—we loved the rebbitzin, who sold us beans and peas on credit, and saved us more than once from the rabbi's hands. I was her special favorite. I was given the largest portions, and when the rabbi had hold of me, she would cry: "Murderer! what are you after, treating an orphan like that? His father's soul will be revenged on you!"

The rabbi would let go of me, and the rebbitzin got what was left.

I remember that one winter's evening I came home from Cheder so pinched by the rabbi and so penetrated by the frost that my skin was quite parched.

And I lifted my eyes to heaven and cried piteously and prayed: "Tatishe, do be revenged on Zerach Kneip! Lord of the world, what does he want of my soul?"

I forgot that he only pinched the body. But a man is to be excused for what he says in his distress.

## 5

On a school holiday, when Zerach Kneip shut the Gemoreh and began to tell stories, he was a different person.

He took off his cap and sat in his bushy locks (the skull-cap was hidden by them) ; he unbuttoned his kafftan, smoothed out his forehead. His lips smiled, and even his voice was different.

He taught us in the hard, gruff, angry voice in which he spoke to the rebbitzin ; he told us stories in the gentle, small, kind voice in which he addressed Shprintze, his dear soul.

And we used to implore him as though he were a brigand to tell us a story. We were unaware of the fact that Zerach Kneip knew only one chapter of the Talmud, with which his course for little boys began and ended, and that he *had* to fill up the time with stories, specially in winter when there are no religious holidays. We little fools used to buy stories of him with peas and beans, and once even we saved up to buy Shprintze a red flannel spencer.

For the said spencer, Reb Zerach told us how the Almighty takes a soul out of his treasure-house and blows it into a body.

And I pictured to myself the souls laid out in the Almighty's store-room like the goods in my mother's shop, in boxes, red, green, white, yellow, and blue, and tied with string.

## 6

"When God," said the rabbi, "has chosen a soul and decided that it is to go down into the sinful world, it trembles and cries.

"In the nine months before birth an angel teaches it

the whole Torah; then he gives it a fillip under the nose, and the soul forgets everything it has learned.

"That," added the rabbi, "is why all Jewish children have cloven upper lips."

That same evening I was skating on the ice outside the town, and I observed that the Gentile boys, Yantek, Voitek, and Yashek, had cloven upper lips just like ours.

"Yashek," I risked my life and asked, "*ti tàkshé màyesh dùshé?*"<sup>1</sup>

"What does it matter to you, soul of a dog?" was the distinct reply.

## 7

Beside going to the rabbi, I had a teacher for writing. This teacher was supposed by the town to be a great heretic, and the neighbors wouldn't borrow his dishes.<sup>2</sup>

He was a widower, and people never believed that Gütele, his daughter, a girl about my age, knew how to make meat kosher.

But he was exceedingly accomplished, and my mother was determined that her only son should learn to write.

"I beg of you, Reb teacher," she said to him, "not to teach him anything heretical, nothing out of the Bible, but teach him how to write a Jewish letter, just a 'greeting to any friend' letter."

But I don't know if he kept his word. When I gave

<sup>1</sup> "You also have a soul?" Polish.

<sup>2</sup> Because he was suspected of not keeping the dietary laws.

him the poser about the cleft lips, he went into a fury; he jumped up from his chair, overturned it with his foot, and began to caper about the room, crying out:

"Blockheads! murderers! bats!" By degrees he grew calm, sat down again, wiped his spectacles, and drew me to him:

"My child," he said, "never believe such rubbish. You took a good look at the Gentile boys who were skating? What are their names?"

I told him.

"Well," he continued, "had any one of them a different kind of eye from yours; different hands or feet or limbs? Don't they laugh just as you do? And if they cry, do they shed another sort of tears? Why should they not have a real soul as well as we? All men are alike, children of one family, one God is their Father, one earth their home. It is true that at present the nations hate each other, and each one persuades itself that *it* is the crown of creation, and occupies all God's thoughts; but *we* hope for a better day, better and brighter, when humanity will acknowledge one God and one law, when the words of our holy prophets will come true, when there shall be an end to all wars and jealousy and hatred; when all will serve one Creator, and it will be as the verse says: "For out of Zion shall go forth the Law and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem."

I knew that verse from the paragraph, "And it came to pass, when the Ark set forward," in the prayer-book.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Our little Talmud student would not be familiar with much of the Prophets' writings beyond what is contained in the prayer-book. The study of the Prophets savored rather of free-thinking.

The teacher went on talking for some time, but I understood little of what he said; I could not believe that "a Gentile has brains, too," that all men were equal. I knew that the teacher held heretical opinions; he did not even believe in the transmigration of souls, as I saw for myself after the death of Fradel Mifkeres (the heretic), when a black dog appeared on the roof of the house where she had lived.

Then he pared his nails in order, and never cut a "witness"<sup>1</sup> to throw out of the window.

I should very soon have run away from him; I should have told my mother of the way he talked, only—

I am sure you guess what and whom I mean.

## 8

This alone remained fixed in my head, that there would be a time when the other nations would come to us to learn Torah, and that it might be to-morrow.

Times with us just then were quite Messianic; strong hints of it were discovered in the Book of Daniel, and the word that stood for the current year indicated it; besides, there was a passage in the Zohar, and in the Midrash ha-Néelom, and it was whispered from ear to ear that the Rebbe of Kozenitz had stopped reciting the Supplications; and there was reliable news from Palestine that no fox had been seen near the "western wall" all that year.

<sup>1</sup> A tiny bit of wood tied up and thrown away with the nails. The superstitions behind this practice are not confined to the Jews.

And people looked every day for Messiah the son of Joseph; Kohol gave bribes to escape paying taxes; when Messiah came, who would trouble about little things like that?

The women came off worst. A few years previously the steps of their bath had fallen in. Goodness knows, it took asking enough before the money was granted for new ones. And now the wood was there, ready and waiting, only it seemed a pity, all the same, to hire a workman and spend those few rubles. And I firmly believed that in a short time Yashek, who pushed me when I was skating, just as I was doing a "cobbler," so that, thanks to him, I all but broke my neck; that Voitek, who always made a pig's ear at me, and Yantek, who counted us—*raz, dva, tshi*—that all three, I say, would come and humbly ask me to explain a ritual question, for instance, concerning things improper for the touch, as a stone on Sabbath.

And I, "merciful and a son of the Merciful," would not remember against them what they had done to me, but would tell them. I would be a friend to them and explain to them the mystery of the iron and the paper bridge; tell them not to venture on to the iron bridge—indeed, that it would be best to keep away altogether, if they wished to save their souls.

## 9

On the eve of New Year I completed the course with Zerach Kneip, and felt as it were the relief of the exodus out of Egypt.

I had been told that my new teacher, Reb Yozel, never pinched; never even hit you for nothing. I had been used to see Reb Yozel at prayers. He was a tall Jew, with huge eyebrows, so that his eyes were quite hidden. He wore his kaftan open, and the "little prayer-scarf" appeared on each side of his long, pointed beard. He walked softly and talked softly, as though of secrets. And while he talked, he nodded his head slowly, lifted his brows, drew his forehead together, thrust out his lips and whiskers, and slid both hands into his girdle; it seemed as though every word he spoke were of the greatest importance.

Reb Yozel had been "messenger" for a time to one of the great wonder-workers, and he had even now a certain amount of oils, coins, amulets, salves, etc.,<sup>1</sup> to sell on commission; he was reckoned the first exorcist in the town, and if the rabbi were poorly, he would preach instead of him on the Great Sabbath and the New Year, and deliver memorial addresses. The rabbi was a weak old man, and Reb Yozel looked to filling his place when he had accomplished his one hundred and twenty years.

Beside this, Reb Yozel was a celebrated blower of the Shofar, and when he repeated the blessing before blowing—how goes the saying?—fish trembled in the water.

And I was filled with pride at the thought of being his pupil.

We had not reached the Day of Atonement before I had an opportunity of questioning Reb Yozel about the soul.

<sup>1</sup> Which had been invested with wonder-working powers.

The soul, with me, had become a sort of *idée fixe*; it was never out of my thoughts. The first thing Reb Yozel did was to empty my head of the notion of other people being our equals, and to fill it up again with "Thou hast chosen us."

"Not in vain," said he, "do we suffer exile, scorn, and other plagues not mentioned in the denunciations of the Pentateuch. Were we like to other nations, we should have *this* world the same as they have it; 'the child whom the father loveth, he correcteth,' so that it may study and enter the gates of knowledge.

"But even with us Jews," went on Reb Yozel, "souls are not all alike; there are coarse, ordinary souls, like Zerach Kneip's, for instance; your teacher, the heretic, has a soul like Korah; there are also very great souls, some of which come from out the space under the Throne of Glory; these belong to the category of *kémach sòlet*.<sup>1</sup>

I understood little, especially about the space under the Throne of Glory; I only knew the meaning of *kémach sòlet*, and supposed the difference between soul and soul was like that between rye-flour, corn-flour, wheat-flour, and the flour which was used for the Sabbath loaf. The greatest of all the souls must be mixed with saffron and raisins.

## 10

"The great thing," said Reb Yozel, "is to suffer.

"No soul will be lost; they must all return to the state

<sup>1</sup>"Fine meal," as in Gen. xviii. 3; used also figuratively.

in which they were previous to their stay on earth. And the souls can be cleansed only by suffering. The Creator, in His great mercy, sends us suffering so that we may remember we are but flesh and blood, a broken potsherd, mere nothings, who fall into dust and ashes at His look; but in the other world also the souls undergo purification."

And he told me all that was done to the poor souls in the seven torture-chambers of Gehenna.

## 11

About the holiday times I had more leisure for looking round at home. Just before Tabernacles, we had a great wash.

One night I dreamt that I was in the next world. I saw how the angels stretched out their hands from heaven and caught hold of the souls who were returning thither. The angels sifted them; those that were clean and white as snow, flew up like doves out of their hands as though into Paradise. The dirty ones were thrown into a heap, and the heap was thrown into the sea of ice, beside which stood black angels with their sleeves rolled up, who washed them. After that they were boiled in a black pot over hell-fire.

And when the dirt was squeezed out of them and they were ironed, the weeping of the souls was heard from one end of the world to the other.

There, in the soiled heap, I recognized the soul of my teacher; it had his long nose, his hollow cheeks, his pointed beard, and it wore his large, blue spectacles. They washed it, and it only looked the blacker.

And an angel called out: "That is the soul of the heretical teacher!" Then the same angel said angrily to me:

"If you walk in his ways, your soul will be as black as his, and it will be washed like this every evening, till it is thrown into Gehenna."

"I will not walk in his ways!" I cried out in my sleep.

My mother woke me and took my hand down from my breast.

"What is it, my treasure?" she asked in alarm. "You are bathed in perspiration;" and she blew upon me—*fu, fu, fu!*

"Mother, I have been in the other world!"

Early next morning my mother asked me in all seriousness if I had seen my father there. I said, "No."

"What a pity! What a pity!" she lamented. "He would certainly have given you a message for me."

## 12

What was to be done, if the teacher even made game of dreams?

For his own sake, still more for Gütele's, I wished to save him, and I described to him the whole of my dream. But he said dreams were foolish; he paid no attention to such things.

He wanted to prove to me out of the Bible and the Talmud that dreams were rubbish, but I stopped my ears with my little fingers and would not listen.

I saw clearly that he was lost; that his sentence would

be a terrible one; that I ought to avoid him like the plague; that he was like to ruin my soul, my young soul.

But, again, what was to be done? I made a hundred resolves to tell my mother, and never kept one of them.

I had my mouth open to speak many a time, but it seemed to me that Gütele stood behind her shoulders, held out her small hands to me in supplication, and spoke with her eyes: "No," she begged, "no, don't tell!"

And the prayer in her eyes overcame my piety; I felt that for her I would go, not through fire and water only, but into hell itself.

And yet it seemed to me a great pity, for my mother and all my teachers were sure that I had in me the making of something remarkable.

## 13

I was quit of Zerach Kneip and his long finger-nail, but I was not so much the better off.

I was sixteen years old. The match-mongers were already catching at my mother's skirts, and I preserved the childish habit of collecting wax off the Shool table on the Day of Atonement and secretly moulding it in Cheder under the table.

The beadle hated me for this with a deadly hatred, and I was well served out for it besides.

"What have you got there?" asks Reb Yozel.

I am wool-gathering at the moment and lay my whole hand on the Gemoreh, wax on all the five fingers.

Reb Yozel has grown pale with anger. He opens the

drawer, takes out a piece of thin string, and binds together my two thumbs, but so tight, a pang goes through me.

That was only the beginning. He went to the broom and deliberately chose and pulled out a thin, flexible twig. With this twig he whipped me over my tied hands—for how long? It seemed to me forever. And strange to say, I took the pain in good part; I felt sure God had sent it me that I might repent of my sin and give up going to the teacher.

When my hands were pretty well swollen and the skin had turned all colors, Reb Yozel put away the twig and said: "Enough! Now you'll let the wax alone!"

I went on moulding wax all the same.

It gave me the greatest satisfaction to make whatever I pleased out of it. I felt I had something to be busy about.

I would mould the head of a man, and then turn it into a cat or a mouse; then I drew the sides out into wings, divided the head into two, and it became an Imperial eagle. After that, out of the two heads and two wings, I made a bun in four pieces.

I myself was just such another piece of wax. Reb Yozel, the teacher, my mother, and anybody who pleased moulded me into shape. Gütele melted me.

#### 14

They moulded me into shapes, but it hurt.

I remember very well that it hurt, but why? Why must I torment myself about the soul?

My comrades laughed at me; they nicknamed me the "soul-boy," and I suffered as much from the name as it was foolish in itself.

I am lost in thought; I wonder what my end will be; when I shall have the strength to tear myself out of Satan's grasp. I call my own soul to account; I reproach it; I scold it. Suddenly I receive a fillip on the nose, "Soul-boy." I wish to forget my troubles and plunge into a deep problem of Rabbinical dialectics; I yoke together a difficult explanation of the Tossafot with a hard passage in the Rambam, mix in a piece from the P'ne Yehoshuah, and top it off with an argument from Eibeschütz. I am in another world, forgotten are the teacher, Gütele, the soul. Things are fitting one into the other in my brain; I nearly "have it," the solution is at the tip of my tongue—a whistle in my ear—"Soul-boy!" It rings through my head, something bursts in my brain. Forgotten Tossafot, forgotten Rambam—I am back on the earth!

I stand repeating the Eighteen Benedictions, my heart and my eyes are alike full of tears, "Heal us, O Eternal, and we shall be healed!" I say with devotion, and I mean not the body, heaven forbid, I mean the soul: "Heal me, Almighty; heal my poor soul!"

"That's the soul-boy," says one to another, pointing at me. And it is all over with my devotion.

Thus I suffered day and night.

15

Gütele was held to be very clever; her father never called her anything but "my little wisdom," and the

neighbors said she was as bright as the day, and that if she were as pious as she was clever, she would rejoice the heart of her mother in Paradise. My mother, too, used to praise her cleverness, and, if only Gütele had known more about koshering meat, she would not have wished for a better daughter-in-law.

And one day, when I found the teacher out, and Gütele alone, it occurred to me to ask her opinion about the soul.

My knees shook, my hands twitched, my heart fluttered; my eyes were fixed on the floor, and yet I asked: "They all say, Gütele, that you are so wise. Tell me, please, what is the soul?"

She smiled and answered:

"I'm sure, I don't know."

Then she grew suddenly sad and tears came into her eyes:

"I just remember," she said to me, "that when my mother was alive (on whom be peace), my father always said she was his soul—they loved one another so dearly."

I don't know what came over me, but that same instant I took her hand and said, trembling:

"Gütele, will you be my soul?" And she answered me quite softly: "Yes!"

X

IN TIME OF PESTILENCE



## X IN TIME OF PESTILENCE

### 1

#### THE TOWN TAKES FRIGHT

It is coming! *öi*, it is already near! In the villages round about people are in peril of death! Lord of the world, what is to be done? "Thou shalt not open thy mouth for Satan"—the name of the pestilence may not cross the lips, but fear descends on every heart like a stone.

And every day there is worse news. In Apte a water-carrier, carrying his cans, has fallen dead in the street. In Ostrovitze they have made post-mortem examinations on two Jews. In Brotkoff there is a doctor with a student from Warsaw. Racheff is isolated; they let nobody out or in. Radom is surrounded by a chain of Cossacks; in Tzoismir, heaven defend us, they say people are falling like flies. A terror!

Trade slackens, piousness increases. Dealers in produce are afraid to leave the spot; big Yossil has already sold his horse and wagon—it's a pity about the oats. The produce-brokers tighten the belt across their empty stomachs, and there is daily more room in the dwellings, because every Friday something more is taken to be pawned against Sabbath. A workman, sometimes even a householder, will take an extra sip of brandy, to put heart into him, but that doesn't go far to fill the inn-

keeper's pocket, and a peasant is seldom to be seen. To make up for this, the Röfeh's wife has removed her wig and put on a hair-band;<sup>1</sup> a secret Maskil has burnt his "Love of Zion"<sup>2</sup> in public and taken to reciting psalms; the bather's maid-servant has gone to the rabbi and asked him how to do penance for having been in the habit of peeping into the men's bath-house, on Fridays, through a chink in the door. A certain young man, not to mention names, has been fasting a whole month and thinks of becoming an ascetic—heaven only knows for what sin. Some of the tailors now return remnants, butchers are more liberal in their cuts, only Yeruchem Chalfen asks ten per cent. a month on a pawn ticket, and no less with a security. His heart is of flint.

And faces grow yellow and livid, lips, blue-brown, eyes look large and round, and heads droop; and the street is hushed. Small, scattered groups, men and women apart, stand and hold voiceless conversation; heads are shaken, hands thrown out, and eyes lifted to the leaden sky spread out over the little town. It is quiet even in the house-of-study between afternoon and evening prayers. On the other hand, the women's gallery in the Shool is full. Every few minutes a piteous cry comes through the grating, and the men feel their hair and nails tingle. There is Kol Nidrei<sup>3</sup> every night, and people are bathed in tears.

What is to be done? Who can advise?

<sup>1</sup> Head-dress with broad ribbon to hide the hair of a married woman.

<sup>2</sup> A celebrated Hebrew novel by Mapu.

<sup>3</sup> Eve of the Day of Atonement.

It is said that in Warsaw they have started tea-houses for the poor, and cheap kitchens; they are giving away coal, clothes, and food for nothing—all "*their*" precautions, all to imitate the nations of the world, and perhaps to please the chief of police. Here other means are employed—"Meïr Baal-Ness,"<sup>1</sup> wonder-workers, and famous charms. Saturday evening, as soon as it is dark, "candles of blessing" are stuck in the windows; outside the town, Vassil has a mill—the stakes shall be conveyed away by night and buried in holy ground; an orphan boy shall be married to an orphan girl—and every possible thing of the kind; only—only, these charms have been from everlasting, and yet, when there was the plague of 1829, the entire market-place was grass-grown with only a pathway or two in the middle, trodden by those who carried the dead.

Besides, and worse even than the plague itself, there is disinfection, isolation, and, heaven have mercy on us, post-mortems. No man can live forever, nor can he die more than once; but death and life are in the hands of the All-Merciful. Weeping, prayer, and confession, these help; almsgiving is a remedy; but the other things mean falling into the hands of men. They suck the marrow out of your bones, it costs you a fortune, treasure and blood—and they make post-mortems! They cut up a corpse, heaven defend us, into little pieces, and bury it without a winding-sheet, in pitch. In the hospital there is poisoning; they burn innocent bedding, or they make

<sup>1</sup> Pious offerings dropped into the collecting-box of "Meïr Baal-Ness," to be found in every orthodox Jewish house. The money is for the poor Jews in Palestine.

a ring of Cossacks, and people may starve to death or devour each other as they choose. Ha! one must be up and doing and not let the enemy into the town.

"Candles of blessing" are already in the windows, side-glances are being cast at Vassil's mill, and a marriage between two orphans is under discussion. And the terror increases day by day. One had hoped that the calamity would pass away with the summer, with the great heat. . . .

These are all over, the Solemn Days, too. Now, thank God, it is after Tabernacles. One feels the cold in one's bones; it snows a little, not unfrequently, and the pestilence creeps on and on. May God watch over us and protect us.

## 2

## TWO ARE NOT AFRAID

And yet there are two persons in the place who are not afraid; and not only that, but they are hoping for the plague.

The two persons are the young doctor, Savitzki, a Christian, and, lehavdîl, Yössil, the beggar-student.

Savitzki came two years and a half ago, straight from the university; he came a good Christian, a treasure, quite one of the righteous of the nations of the world; people wished the town-justice were as good. There wasn't a particle of pride in the man; he never gave himself airs; he greeted everyone he passed, even a child, even a woman. For an old person he would step aside. He loved Jewish fish as life itself, and the house-

holders treated him one and all with respect; they bowed to him and took off as much as the whole hat; they sent him Sabbath cakes, and often asked him in to fish. In fact, they wished him all that is good, only—they never consulted him. Who wanted a doctor? Hadn't they a Röfeh? And what a Röfeh! He has only to give the patient one look to know what is the matter with him. So it's no wonder the apothecary is willing to make up his prescriptions. It is possible that another doctor might have got a practice quicker. For instance, if there had come an old doctor with long experience and leaving a large practice somewhere behind him, but there appears this popinjay, who cannot even twirl the down on his upper lip, with a young, pale face like a girl's, dressed like a dandy, a boy fresh from school. And just as the eggs always know more than the hen, so must he think himself better than the old Röfeh, who, as the saying goes, had eaten up his teeth at the work. So must he say, that the sick take overmuch castor oil, that cupping was a mistake, especially for a woman in child-bed; leeches he wanted put on the shelf, that they might do no harm; dry-cupping he made fun of, and he had no faith in salves. Did you ever hear of a doctor without salves and without blood-letting? Who would consult him? An apothecary turns up his nose at such an one's prescriptions—for twenty groschen apiece.

Thus it went on for six months; there was open war with the Röfeh and hidden war with the apothecary, and yet he was on very good terms with the householders.

Thus it went on, I say, till Savitzki came to the last

of the few gulden which he had brought with him from somewhere; after a bit he got behindhand with his rent, and was in debt to the butcher and the grocer and the tailor—he was in debt all round—and the creditors grew daily more impatient.

And once, when the butcher had sent back the maid without any meat, Savitzki let his wings droop, and confessed that blood-letting was necessary, and that castor oil might be taken every minute; but this did him no good at all, because, first, no one believed him, that he really meant it—it was very likely only to take people in; secondly, supposing it were so, and he had really given in to the Rōfeh, then what was he wanted for?

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Savitzki got another gulden or two from somewhere (Christians often inherit things from rich uncles and aunts), and dragged on another six months, at the end of which he had an inspiration: *he became an anti-Semite*, and a real bitter one.

He left off saluting people, and now, if he stepped aside for a Jew, it was to spit out before him.

He persuaded the town-justice, even though it was winter, to drive a few Jewish families off the peasants' land, and when there came a new inspector (the old ones had their hush-money), he would himself take him round the courtyards and show him where there lurked uncleanness. He told the apothecary one day that in *his* place he should give all the Jews poison; and many, many more things of the kind.

*This* idea really proved helpful. Certain of the house-

holders began to call him in and paid him for his visits, although they would afterwards tear up his prescriptions, pour out his mixtures, throw away his ointment. The enemy of Israel must have his mouth shut; that also was a kind of "hush-money"; but Savitzki did not make a living by it.

He had no more inspirations, and there was no hope of things bettering themselves.

In addition to this he had the following misfortunes: he was unable to extract a pea out of a little boy's ear; a sick man risked his life by taking one of Savitzki's prescriptions and in a week he was dead. But the worst was that he forgot himself one day and declared that fever was not in itself an illness, but a remedy, a weapon by means of which the body would rid itself of the disease. Those who heard him all but split with laughter; and still more did they pant for laughing when it happened that he was called in to a woman in child-bed at the critical moment, because the "town-grandmother" was away on business in a village, and there was no help for it. The ridiculous things he did! He called for a basin of water, a piece of soap. He poured something into the basin out of a little bottle he had brought in his pocket. The people stood and watched him, and concluded he made up his medicines at home to annoy the apothecary—but heaven only knew what it was. Then he just went and washed his hands; and yet his hands were as clean as clean could be, as is the way with Christians. And as if that wasn't enough, he took out a knife and cleaned his nails—really, *lehavdil*, he might have been a pious Jewess. Then he rubbed

his hands and washed them anew. What more shall I say about his conjuring tricks? Then to business. The woman (it was not her first) said he certainly had smaller hands than the "town-grandmother," and was quicker at it, too, except for his fads.

But who could stand all that fuss?

And when there's no soap to be had? It just happened to have been washing day, but otherwise?

The result of all this was that Savitzki went about like a wicked man in the other world, and at the end of two years and a half he saw he would not be able to hold on there; that his "inexpressibles" were getting too big for him, that he was growing daily thinner, and might fall into a decline; he was preparing to run away and leave his debts behind, and now—*it* was near.

No, this is not the time to leave a town of the kind; there are golden days coming. They have already sent an order to build a "barrack" for cholera patients and to set apart a house for their families; and although the heads of the community have forked out and bribed the town-justice and the inspectors, to set down the "expenditures" for the barrack as though it had been built, and not alarm the town, everyone felt it was on the move, that it was coming; that it meant peril of death to everyone and good luck to Savitzki. He will get three to four rubles a day from the government, the sick will pay him extra, and those who are well will pay not to be put down as sick. All the Jews will pay, for disinfection and no-disinfection, isolation and non-isolation, for being let in and let out, for speaking and for being silent, and above all, "burial money"—not to be

made the subject of a post-mortem and be buried in pitch.

Savitzki revived. His heart grew light within him.

He paced the streets whistling a merry air; he looked cheerily into everyone's face, peeped in at all the doors and windows. Jews like to hide themselves, ah! but he will not allow it. They shall pay him for the past years—he will come into his own.

Then he will leave the dead-alive place and marry. Whom should he find here? The apothecary's daughter—that ugly thing?

## 3

## THE SECOND WHO IS NOT AFRAID

Yössil, the beggar-student, would also like to marry, and has equally put his hope in the pestilence; he is the one orphan lad in the town. The householders could get no other if they wished. They will *have* to marry him off.

And he wishes it very much, which is no wonder—it is in the family. His father and his grandfather at his age had already buried children, and he is eighteen years old. He is “a scorn and a derision.” They call him “bachelor” and “old maid,” he has no peace at the academy all day. The allusions made at his expense prick him like pins. At night, it's worse. He lies all alone in the house-of-study on the hard bench, and does not sleep whole nights—the bad dreams will not let him; he is ready to crawl up the wall.

He begs and implores the neighbors to marry him. He

asks mercy, and the answer is always the same: "Unless it be the Queen of Sheba, who will look at you, scab?"

That, as it happened, was something Yössil had not; but he had other attractions. He had come to the place fourteen years before, with his father, a book-peddler who fell ill on his way through and who—not of you be it said!—died there.

He had never known his mother, and therefore had wandered about with his father from babyhood.

Kohol was moved to pity, householders bought up all the books in order to bury the father, which they did almost for nothing, and even gave him a nice grave.

The orphan was taken into the Talmud Torah and told to sleep in the house-of-study; he ate "days,"<sup>1</sup> as he was still doing when my story begins.

In half a year's time he went through measles in the house-of-study, and then small-pox, and got a face as pitted as a grater.

The next year brought a new misfortune. In the house-of-study was an old split stove, of which Yössil was the official heater. This oven was a useless old thing and gave out no heat. By day things were bearable; at night the stove went down to freezing-point. Yössil's rags, given him by the householders on some holiday, were hardly enough to clothe him, never sufficient for extra covering at night.

On day Yössil thought the matter over, and stole the

<sup>1</sup>Free meals given to poor students at the tables of different householders.

key of the wood store-room. He commenced to steal wood, and every day he heated the stove more, and sat by the fire and warmed himself. At last, as people said, God punished him for his theft: the stove suddenly burst, and a piece flew out and broke his foot. The town Rōfeh cured it, but it remained shorter than the other, and Yössil limped from that day forward.

And he was no genius, not even specially diligent. Who would fix on him? Whom was he likely to attract? Not even a water-carrier would take him for a son-in-law. Meantime, as though to spite him, his eyes would burn like hot coals, his heart beat and yearned and sickened after something. He often felt dizzy, there was a sound as of bells in his ears, and he shook as in a fever, hot and cold, hot and cold.

But who troubles about an orphan?

The householders feel they have done their part in giving him free meals. What sort of meals? Well, what merit is there to be secured in feeding a boy like that? A boy who won't learn, sits over a book, and is all the time wool-gathering? You speak to him and he doesn't hear.

And all of a sudden he starts up and jumps away from his place, leaves the book open, and runs about the house-of-study like a mad thing, upsets the reading-desks, upsets the people, like one possessed.

A madcap, a scatter-brain. Tendons, bones, mouldy bread, the day before yesterday's porridge—and *that's* a waste! What's the use of him? He may thank his stars that he's an orphan.

A boy of that sort in a family is apprenticed to a

workman, but nobody wants to undertake a strange child. Who would care to be responsible for it? Besides, the father was a learned man, who recited Torah in his last moments, and who died like a saint in the seventh month, after making a very clear confession of sins; and who would dare apprentice the child of such an one to a workman?<sup>1</sup> Who would undertake to answer for it to the dead?

And so Yössil grew up alone in the house-of-study; by day he was tormented by malicious observations and at night by bad dreams; it is two or three years since he had rest.

But he would not let himself drift; he felt that these were bad thoughts, evil dreams; but they grew stronger and stronger, and his will grew weaker, and he began to fast, but this was of no avail; to recite psalms—no use at all; to study—when he could not read the letters? Fiery wheels circled before his eyes.

He saw that the seducer was stronger than he was, and he let his wings droop and ceased to oppose him. He only consoled himself with the thought that he, too, might be married some day. And he waited for the match-mongers, and then, as they did not come to him, he put shame aside and went to them. But that is not done so easily.

Months passed before he ventured to speak to a match-monger; first to one, then to another, then to a third, until he had been to all there were in the town. And when the last one had given him the same reply as the

<sup>1</sup> Instead of bringing him up to the study of the Law.

others, that no one would look at him but the Queen of Sheba, he fell into great despondency.

Life had become hateful to him. One night it occurred to him that it would be better to die than to live thus.

He began to battle afresh with this new sinful thought, and again his strength began to fail. The first time the thought came like a lightning-flash and vanished. The following day it came again and staid longer; on the third day he had time to consider it; he remembered that last week there had been a strong wind, a sign that some one had hanged himself. Perhaps a Gentile? No; there would never be a wind because of a Gentile; it must have been a Jew. A year ago, there was a Jew drowned in the bath, Chaïm the tailor. Who knows, perhaps he drowned himself on purpose? What should a tailor be doing in the bath in the middle of the week? On the eve of the Day of Atonement everyone goes, but on a Wednesday like any other? . . . .

A few days later he felt drawn to the bath as though by pincers. Where is the harm? I can go if I like. He went, but he did not even undress. He felt that once in, he would never come out again, that he would remain there. He stood some time leaning over the bath, he could not tear himself away from it, but gazed at the dark water with a faint reflection of himself trembling on the surface. Then it seemed to him, that was not *his* image, but Chaïm the tailor's, and that Chaïm the tailor smiled and beckoned to him: "Come! come! It is so quiet here, so cool—a delight!"

He grew hot all over and fled in terror. It was only

in the street that he collected himself again. Passing a rope-maker's, he observed that the ropes lay tossed about anyhow; the rope-maker had gone away somewhere. Why had he just gone away? Where to? A few other such silly questions passed through Yössil's mind, while his hands, acting of themselves, stole away a rope that happened to be lying on the door-step.

He was not aware of the theft till he found himself back in the house-of-study. He was very much surprised—he could not think how the cord had got into his pocket.

“It is God's doing,” he thought, with tears in his eyes; “God Himself wishes me to take my life, to hang myself!” and he felt a bitterly piteous compassion for himself in his heart. God who had created him, who had made him an orphan, who had sent him the small-pox, and had thrown the piece of the stove at him, wishes him now to hang himself. He has refused him *this* world, and now he is to lose the other as well. Why?

Because he had not mastered the seducer?

How could he? All by himself—without parents, without companions—and the seducer is, after all, an angel, and has been under arms since the Creation; and Yössil feels very wretched and unhappy. God Himself is unjust to him, if He wishes him to hang himself. He sees it clearly, there is no uncertainty about it. And what is the outcome? If God wills it so, what can he do, he, the worm, the orphan?

He cannot withstand the seducer, then how shall he dare to think of going against God? No; he will not attempt to go against God.

He takes the rope and goes up into the loft of the Shool. He will not profane the house-of-study. He will not hang himself over against the Ark.

In the loft there is a hook, equally provided by Him. How else should there be a hook up there? Who knows how long the hook has been waiting for him? God may have prepared it before he, Yössil, was born or thought of.

Thus considering, he folded the rope. Something had occurred to him: And suppose the contrary? Suppose it to be the work of Satan? Suppose the same Satan who sends me the other thoughts had sent me this one, too?

And he let the rope be—it is a matter for consideration. He must think it well over. To lose both this world and the world to come is no trifle.

Thereupon the clock struck four—dinner-time and he became suddenly aware that his stomach was cramped with hunger.

And he came down from the loft and left the rope folded up.

Every night he feels drawn to the rope. He does what he can to save himself—he runs to the Ark, puts his head in among the holy scrolls, and cries pitifully to them for help. He frequently clasps a desk, so that it may be more difficult for him to leave the spot, or he clings with all his might to the old stove.

And who knows what the issue of the struggle would have been but for the pestilence?

Oh! now he drew a deep breath of relief. An end to

hanging, an end to melancholy. They will have to give him a companion, and *not* the Queen of Sheba; he is the *one* orphan in the town.

## 4

## SAVITZKI WITHDRAWS—YÖSSIL GOES INTO RETREAT

Since the dread of the pestilence had so increased, the townsfolk ran a mile when they saw Savitzki coming. They were afraid of him—and no wonder. After all, a man is only flesh and blood, he may suddenly become indisposed any day, and Savitzki now is cock of the walk. He can have people put to bed, smeared, rubbed, can pour drugs down their throats, drive out the whole family, burn the furniture, poison people, and then make post-mortems. What an outrage! When doctors want to know the nature of an illness, they poison off the first patients and look for little worms inside them. But what is to be done? When one is in exile—one is! . . .

A Röfeh in Apte having declared that the doctor there poisoned his patients, they imprisoned him for three months on bread and water. You think I mean the doctor? No, mercy on us, the Röfeh!

That is why, when Savitzki appeared in the street, it grew suddenly empty. If he looked up at a window, a blind was drawn, or the window was filled up with a sheet, a cushion—anything.

One fine morning the street where Savitzki lived stood empty—all the householders and the tenants had moved away overnight. No one wished to come within his

area. It was a real case of "woe to the wicked and woe to his neighbor!"

Savitzki has remarked it, and he is silent. More than that, he has withdrawn himself from the town for the time being—just as a cat will spring aside from a mouse—it won't run away.

He sits the whole day at home, or goes for walks outside the town in the mud. He is sure of his game, then why irritate the people by prying? When the time comes, he will know; doors and windows won't keep the thing in; there will be cries as on the Day of Atonement. The Jews have little self-control. They are a people very much afraid of death, and helpless when face to face with sickness.

Savitzki had lived through a typhus epidemic; he had seen the overflow of feeling, heard the cries and commotion. He seemed to be in a sea of lamentation and wailing. O no, they will never keep it to themselves.

He withdrew from the street. And Yössil withdrew from the street and the house-of-study as well. One wished it, the other had to do it.

Since there was more talk of the pestilence, Yössil's whole melancholy had vanished, as though brushed away by the hand. Indeed, he grew more cheerful, merrier day by day, and would often, without meaning to do so, burst out laughing. He could not help himself, it bubbled up within him; he had to laugh. It tickled him in all his limbs. The paler the householders grew, the ruddier grew he; the lower they hung their heads, the higher he carried his; the more subdued grew their voices, the clearer and fuller Yössil's, and—the more

the house-of-study sighed, the louder his laughter: ha-ha-ha! And it was not his fault, something in him laughed of itself.

And at a time when all other eyes were dim and moist, his shone brighter and brighter; they fairly sparkled. At a time when people stood and looked at each other open-mouthed, not daring to move a limb, his feet danced beneath him; he could have kissed every desk, the stove, the walls.

"Is he mad?" people asked, "or what has possessed him?"

"He's most certainly mad," was the reply.

"Certainly! He ought to be sent to the asylum."

Yössil was not afraid even of the asylum; he knows that Kohol will not spend money on that. A few years ago a mad woman was frozen to death in the street, after running around a whole winter without clothes, and all that time it never occurred to anyone to hire a conveyance and have her taken to a refuge. People were extremely sorry for her. Another in her case would have gone about the country and begged a few pence. She hadn't even the wits to do so much. The householders only sighed, and there it ended. Why should he, Yössil, be of more consequence? He is anxious not to make Kohol angry; there is no other orphan, true, but—if Kohol became angry, they might have one brought. And someone else might become an orphan! Alarming thought! Anyhow, Kohol will have to give a wedding-present. It is well to keep on terms with people.

Secondly, Yössil is afraid lest they should take him

for a real lunatic and *have* to get another. They would never marry a *real* lunatic. There would be no use in that. Another thing—and this is the principal one—he needs retirement. He must be alone with his thoughts, he must reflect and consider, and dream by night and by day.

He finds rest now at night in the house-of-study; when the others go, and he is left alone with the desks and chairs, he runs to the window, presses his burning forehead against the cold pane; it grows cool in his brain, his ideas move in order. If it is a clear night, he thinks the moon is making signs to him, that is, that Joshua, the son of Nun,<sup>1</sup> says to him, in pantomime, yes or no, as he thinks best.

By day he saunters about by himself outside the town. He does not feel the creeping cold that makes its way in through the holes in his garments; he does not feel the wet that enters boldly his half-open boots; he makes gestures with his hand, talks to himself, to the leaden clouds, or to the pale winter sun; he has so much to think about, so much to say. He is the one orphan lad, but there are three orphan girls, and he would like to know which of them is for him.

In the foreground stands Devosheh, daughter of Jeremiah, the shoemaker.

The latter was kind to Yössil before he died, and would sometimes call him in and mend his boots; once he gave him a pair of cobbler's shoes; he would spare

<sup>1</sup> The man in the moon is sometimes identified with Joshua in Jewish legend.

him a piece of bread and dripping, or an onion. Yössil, on these occasions, could not take his eyes off Devosheh—O, he remembers her well. She stands before him now, a stout, healthy girl, red-cheeked like a Simchas-Torah apple, and strong as they make them. When she takes the hatchet, the splinters fly. If Jeremiah had not died, Yössil would have proposed the match—he liked a fine, healthy girl of the sort. When he thinks of her, his mouth waters. Once—he cannot forget it—he met her on the stairs, and she attracted him like a magnet. He went close and touched her dress, and she gave him a little push which all but sent him rolling down. A good thing he caught hold of the banisters. After that it was some time before he dared show himself upstairs again; he was afraid, lest she should have told her father; and later on when he would have risked it and gone with his life in his hand, Jeremiah was already ill. He lay sick for about three weeks and then died. Then his wife fell into a decline and died, too. Now Devosheh is maid-servant at Saul the money-lender's. When he goes there for his "day," he sometimes finds himself alone with her in the room; then he hasn't the courage to say a word to her; she has a look in her eyes! But if Kohol wishes it, she will never dare to say no! Kohol is Kohol! Devosheh, he thought longingly, would be good to have; he can imagine no better wife. He may possibly get a "pat on the cheek" from her, but that's nothing unusual, and he will take it kindly. He will only hug and kiss her for it. He would wash the dust off her feet and follow her about like a child. He would obey her, stroke her, fondle her, and press her

tight to his heart—tighter still, though it should beat even quicker than it was beating now, though it should burst, though it should jump out of him; though his soul should escape, he would die at her feet—and he *will* press her to himself.

*Ach!* if Kohol would only settle on Devosheh! Her little finger is worth the whole of another woman. He asks for nothing more at present than her little finger; he would take it and squeeze it with all his might, to prove to her that she wanted a husband.

But Kohol may think of another orphan.

Yonder, at the burial ground, is a second; there she is, though he does not know her name; she is only half an orphan, motherless, but she has a father; only what a father! It were better to have none! A nice person is Beril, the grave-digger. He spends the day in the public houses, and leaves her alone among the graves. Sometimes he even goes home tipsy and beats her; they say he even measures the graves with her, dragging her along by the hair—the whole town says it—but nobody wants to interfere, they are afraid of him; a drunkard and a strong man besides. Some few years ago he gave Mösheh Gläser a poke in the side, just for good fellowship, and the latter has had a lung trouble ever since; he grows paler every day, and can hardly breathe. If the daughter were not as hard as nails, she wouldn't be alive; the mother went down into an early grave. And what does he want with the girl? Yössil feels a pang at his heart. He saw her one day and will never forget it. He saw her at the funeral of Jeremiah, the shoemaker, when he was afraid to go near to the grave lest he should find himself close to Devosheh.

She was crying, and her tears would have fallen on his heart like molten lead. So he turned away and walked round about the cemetery, and two or three times he passed the window of Beril, the grave-digger. He saw her standing with downcast eyes peeling potatoes—a pale, ethereal figure. He could have clasped her with one hand; but she must be a good-hearted girl, she has such eyes, such a look. Once she lifted her eyelids—and Devosheh was nowhere. The whole funeral was nowhere—such was the gentleness that beamed in her blue eyes and the sweetness in her face. Only Queen Esther could have looked like that, and Queen Esther was sallow,<sup>1</sup> while she is white like alabaster. Her hair is black as coal, but then, once she was married, it would not be seen any more. *Ai*, how beautiful she is! How she leads the heart captive! And she has another merit in his eyes; when he sees Devosheh, it excites him, but while he looked at her, it felt good, and light, and warm within him.

From that day forward he attended every funeral, and glanced in at the window.

Yes, he wants her, too! Let it rather be her; he would just as soon, in fact, it would be better so.

He would treat her like a toy, play with her all day, and do everything for her. He would never let her dip a hand in cold water. He would do all the chopping, cooking, baking, and washing, indeed, everything, upon the one condition that she should stand and watch him and smile. When there was time, he would take her

<sup>1</sup> According to the Talmudical legend.

and carry her about like a little child. He would rise with the dawn, and, in winter time, soon have the stove lighted; in summer, soon have set the kettle on for morning tea. He would walk softly, on his toes, and quietly dust her dress and shoes; he would quietly place the clothes beside her bed; and then only go noiselessly and bend over her and look at her, and look at her, till the sun rose, and it was broad day, till the sun shone in at the window—then only wake her with a kiss. That would be a life worth the name!

And a good match, too! *öi! öi!* Devosheh may have a few gulden, she is saving, but *she* holds a Parnosseh, as it were, in her hand. Everyone knows that Beril is being burnt up by brandy; the Röfeh says he eats nothing and goes about, heaven defend us, with his inside full of holes. In a hundred and twenty years to come, Yössil might take over the grave-digging—why not? At first he would feel frightened of the corpses, but one gets used to everything. With *her* beside him he would feel at home in Gehenna. It is not a nice Parnosseh, but then he would be able to live outside the town, apart, no one could overlook him. That would be a life—Paradise in the burial ground!

But if the lot should fall on “Lapei?” “Lapei” is the nickname of the third orphan girl. When he remembers *her*, he grows cold in every limb. She is a town orphan, who has been one ever since he can remember—sickly, with a large head, hair that falls out, and somewhat crooked feet. She doesn’t walk on her soles, but on her toes, with her heels in the air, and as she walks, she wobbles like a tipsy person. He often meets *her* in

the street; she has no home of her own, but goes from house to house, helping the servants—fetches water for one, wood for another, helps a third to chop up a little resinous fir-wood, carries a bucket, fills a tub. When she has no work, she begs. Once a year she washes the floor of the house-of-study. Where she spends the night, he does not know. Lapei, Lapei! he pictures her to himself and he shudders.

He feels cold all over. She must be forty years old. She has looked so much ever since he can remember.

“Lord of the world!” he cries out in terror, “that would be worse than hanging!” and lifts his terrified eyes imploringly to heaven. On his pale forehead are drops of perspiration as large as peas.

But he is moved to compassion in his heart. Poor thing! She would certainly also like to be married, she is equally a blind sheep, equally an orphan. She has nothing, either, beyond a God in heaven. He feels inclined to weep over her lot and his together, and, on second thoughts, he places himself in God’s hands. If God wills it so, it shall be she! He throws himself on God and on Kohol. The one destined by God and given by Kohol shall be his mate, he will honor her and be true to her, and will be to her a husband like any other, and he will forget the other two.

Then a fresh anxiety rises within him: If the destined one be Lapei, where are they to live? Where can they go? What will they do? She hasn’t a penny, and goes about tattered, a draggie-tail, and sells her birth-right for a handful of cold potatoes. She takes two gulden for washing the floor of the house-of-study—not

enough for dry bread—and he, what can he do? Of what use is he?

Were he not lame, he would be a messenger. He knows no trade, unless (he consoles himself) he became a teacher. All the householders will give wedding-presents, and he will hire a room with the money and start keeping school; he knows quite enough to teach, especially little children. Let come what may if only he has a wife. There are Jews who have uglier wives, and who are worse cripples . . . but there they are! A wife is a wife! Only not to live alone and eat “days!”

And he may yet succeed in getting one of the other two, and once more he begins to invent a Paradise. And he smiles on at the mud and the leaden clouds.

Hush! something has occurred to him. If he knew for certain that poor Lapei was fated to die of the pestilence, he would gladly marry her. At least, poor thing, she would have had a husband before she died. If only for a month. Why not? Is she not a Jewish daughter? It wouldn't hurt him, and it would be fair on the part of His blessed Name. He does not wish her death, heaven forbid! On the contrary, he is sorry for her; he feels and knows the meaning of “misery,” of being all alone, always all alone.

## 5

## SAVITZKI AND YÖSSIL TOGETHER

One day, as Yössil, the beggar-student, was splashing through the mud, lost in thought, he suddenly felt him-

self caught hold of by the sleeve. He turned round in a fright and was still more alarmed on seeing before him—Dr. Savitzki.

Savitzki and Yössil had often passed each other outside the town, and Yössil had always taken off his torn cap and bowed low before the Christian. Savitzki, the first time, had spat out; the second time, he had thrown out an evil, anti-Semitic look; the third time, he had only glanced into Yössil's face. Later he half smiled—and to-day, for the first time, he had caught him by the sleeve.

They saw in each other's eyes that there was a link between them, that they had a common interest, a common hope, that something bound them together.

Savitzki was now quite alone in the town. At one time, he used to go in to the apothecary, but the latter had lately given him to understand, that he had done him harm; that people had grown afraid, on Savitzki's account, of buying bitter-water and castor oil, the apothecary's great stand-by.

The Christian townspeople had also begun to avoid him; they, too, believed that doctors poison people, and Savitzki was probably no better than the rest.

It was rumored that in some little place or other, a set of tramps had burnt the "barrack" and stoned the doctor. There was occasionally a gleam in the eyes of the townsfolk that boded no good.

Yössil got on without other people, Savitzki longed for someone to speak to. He wondered himself how it was that the lame *Zhidlak's*<sup>1</sup> pitted face seemed so pleas-

<sup>1</sup> Little Jew.

ant to him. True, he had a little business with him; it was possible the plague was already there, only people were hiding it. One might be able to learn something from the said *Zhidlak*.

Yössil, on being caught by the sleeve, had given a start; but he soon recovered himself, and did not even notice how quickly Savitzki let go of his dirty coat; he only saw that Savitzki was no longer angry, but smiling.

"Well," inquired Savitzki, in Polish, "no cholera?"

Yössil had once driven out with the town Dayan to a mill to guard wheat for Passover, and had there learned a few Polish words. He understood Savitzki's question; the word "cholera," in spite of the fact that it represented all his hopes, gave him a pang "in the seventh rib," his face twitched, but he composed himself and replied: "None, honored sir, none!" And without his being conscious of it, the answer rang sadly.

They soon parted. The day following they met again, advancing toward one another.

Yössil stood aside like a soldier saluting, but without putting his hand to his cap; Savitzki stopped a moment to ask:

"Well, not yet?"

"Not yet, honored sir, not yet!" was Yössil's reply.

The third day they met again and remained longer together.

Savitzki questioned him as to whether there was no talk anywhere of diarrhoea and sickness, cholereen, etc., or any other intestinal trouble.

Yössil could not understand everything Savitzki said, but he made a good shot, concluding that he was being asked about sicknesses of a suspicious nature.

"Nothing, honored sir, nothing!" he kept answering. He knew that so far all was quiet in the town.

"Nothing yet, but it will come!" was Savitzki's consoling observation as he walked away.

A little time passed, and they had got into the habit, when they met, of walking a few steps together; Savitzki continued to question and to receive the same reply: "Nothing, sir, nothing," and still he consoled himself and Yössil with: "It will come!"

"It must come!" he declared with assurance, and Yössil translated it into Hebrew: "And although it tarry, I expect it,"<sup>1</sup> and his heart expanded.

He wished the town no harm. Savitzki might wish for a great outbreak of the pestilence, he only desired a little one, a little tiny one. No one was to die, heaven forbid! A few householders should fall ill—nothing more would be necessary. That is all he asks. He does not wish that his greatest enemy should die.

This lasted a month. Savitzki even began to lose patience, and made Yössil a proposal. He felt sure something must be happening, only that people kept it hid. They were afraid of making it known—Jews are so nervous. So he proposed that Yössil should pry, find out, and tell him of only one hidden case, tell him of anything. He would be grateful to him.

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Savitzki talked too quick for Yössil and too "high Polish," but he understood that Savitzki wished to make a spy of him and have him betray the Jewish sick.

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from the twelfth principle of the Jewish faith, relating to the Messiah.

"No," he thought, "no, Yössil is not going to turn informer!" He is resolved not to let out a word to Savitzki, and yet, in spite of himself, and for politeness' sake, he nodded in affirmation, and Savitzki walked away.

Yössil's determination not to tell tales strengthened, but there was no reason why he should not find out for himself if they were not concealing something, and he began to go in and out among the people assembled for daily prayer, to see if no one were missing; if he remarked any one's absence, he tried to discover the reason, but it came to nothing. It always turned out to be that the person had risked his life going out into a village to buy stores; or else he had quarrelled with his wife, and was ashamed to come to the house-of-study with a swollen cheek, or he had been to the Rōfeh to have a tooth out and they couldn't stop the bleeding; and other such trifles that had no connection with the object of his interest. And every day he was able to report honestly to Savitzki: "Nothing, honored sir, nothing!"

Every day now they waited one for the other, and every day they talked longer together.

Yössil endeavored with all his might to make himself intelligible to Savitzki; he worked his hands and his feet, and Savitzki, who had learnt to understand the gestures, had often to save himself from Yössil's too energetic demonstrations.

Savitzki could not make out what Yössil was after, why he kept at a distance from Kohol, and why, as was clearly to be seen, he also wished for the pestilence—but

he had no time to busy himself with the problem—to fathom the mind of a Jew. It was probably a matter of business—perhaps he dealt in linen for winding-sheets. Perhaps he made coffins. But when he remarked that Yössil was growing depressed, that he was less sure than Savitzki that it must come to-morrow, he talked to him freely, gave him courage, and made him confident once more that the community would not escape.

To Savitzki it was clear as daylight that it would come. It was getting nearer and nearer—was it not in all the papers?

Six weeks passed. The sharp frosts, for which the community was hoping, had not been, but the pestilence desired by Savitzki and Yössil delayed equally. Even Savitzki began to have his doubts, but encouraging Yössil, he encouraged himself in the matter. It was simply impossible that it should not come. Was there a less clean town anywhere? Where else did people eat so many gherkins, so much raw fruit, and as many onions? Where were they less well provided with cold water? There were perhaps two or three well-to-do people in the place with metal samovars; three to four houses where they made tea; in the rest they drank pear-drink after the Sholent<sup>1</sup> and old, putrid fish was sold galore.

It must come!

There were towns over which the pestilence had no power: Aix, Birmingham, and others whose names

<sup>1</sup> Sabbath dish prepared the day before, and kept in a heated oven overnight.

Yössil could not catch; but there people ate no Sholent, and tea was made with distilled water—that was different.

Meantime another week passed and nothing happened. On the contrary, it was reported that in Apte it had decreased considerably; Racheff was open again; in Tzoismir they had even closed the tea-house for poor people, which had been started to please the governor. Yössil began to think his sorry luck would make all his plans evaporate into thin air, that his town was also a kind of Birmingham, over which the pestilence had no power. He began to have his old bad nights and felt restless even in the day-time. The brides seemed further off than ever, and, except during the half-hour spent with Savitzki, he had no rest.

He saw the townsfolk growing unmistakably calmer; then it was said that the villages round about had returned to their normal state. The whole town revived; the women ceased to wail in the synagogue; the younger ones gave up coming to prayers at all, except now and again on Sabbath as before; the Röfeh's wife began to think of putting on her wig again. The bather's maid-servant was in people's mouths, and they had even reported her to the rabbi. The Maskil recommenced to write in Hebrew; dealers in produce, to drive out into the country; brokers, to make money; the Sunday market was crowded with peasants, the public-houses filled; salt, naphthaline, and other household wares began to sell. The town assumed its old aspect, window blinds disappeared; Savitzki's street came to life again.

Yössil's condition grew daily worse. His former

melancholy had returned in part. Instead of brides, he had the rope in the loft continually before his eyes. It beckons him and calls to him: Come, come! rid yourself of Kohol, rid yourself of this wretched life. But he resisted: Savitzki is a doctor, he must know. And Savitzki holds to his opinion.

One day Yössil did not meet Savitzki outside the town, and just the day he wanted him most.

Hardly had Yössil awoke, early that morning—it was still dark—when the beadle burst joyfully into the house-of-study, with “Do you hear, Yössil? The doctor and the student have left Raeheff! And last night, just at new moon, there was a hard frost, an iron frost. No fear of the pestilence now!” he cried out and ran to call people to prayers with the good news.

Yössil dressed quickly, that is, he threw round him the cloak he had been using as a covering, and began to move jerkily to and fro across the house-of-study, every now and then running to the window to see if it were daylight, if it were time to hasten out after Savitzki. Hardly had the day fairly broken, when he recited the morning prayers and ran, without having breakfasted, outside the town. He felt that without comfort from Savitzki his heart would burst.

He waited about, hungry, till midday; Savitzki did not come, he must wait—it had happened before that Savitzki did not appear till the afternoon.

He is hungry, very hungry, but it never occurs to him to go and buy food; he must wait for Savitzki. Without having seen him and received comfort from him, he could not swallow one bite. He will have another bad

night; he will be drawn to the rope. No, let him fast for once! Another hour has passed, it begins to grow dark, the pallid spot of winter sun behind the clouds sinks lower and lower, and will shortly vanish behind Vassil's mill. He shivers with cold; he runs to warm himself, claps his hands together, and Savitzki does not come. He has never been so late before.

He began to think there must have been an accident; Savitzki must have been taken ill, or else (Yössil grows angry) he is playing cards, the Gentile! And the pale ball of sun sinks lower and lower, and in the other, clearer half of the sky appears a second pale misty spot like a sickle. That is the young moon, it is time for evening prayer.

Yössil loses all hope: Savitzki will not come now. The tears choke him. He hurries back to the house-of-study, to be at least in time for prayers.

He met scarcely anyone in the street, the men had all gone to pray, only here and there a woman's voice sounded cheerfully through the doors of the little shops and followed him to the steps of the house-of-study. His limbs shook beneath him from exhaustion; there must be some very good news to make the women laugh so loud.

He could hardly climb the stairs. Outside the door he stopped; he had not the courage to turn the handle; the people were not praying, but they were talking cheerily and all at once; heaven knows what the householders were all so happy about.

Suddenly he grew angry and flung open the door.

"And Savitzki," were the first words he heard, "has also, thank heaven, taken himself off."

"Really and truly?" someone asked

"Saw it myself," said the other, "with my own eyes."

Yössil heard no more; his limbs gave way and his whole body was seized with trembling; he just dragged himself to a bench and sat there like one turned to stone, with great, staring eyes.

## 6

## THE END

The happy assembly did not notice it. After Mincháḥ and Maariv (some few only after a page of Gemoreh, or a chapter of Mishnayes), they went away and left Yössil alone as usual. Even the householder in whose house Yössil should have eaten that day's meals never thought of going up to him and asking why he had not been to breakfast, and why he was not coming back with him to supper; he just hurried home along with the rest, to tell his wife and children the good news, that Savitzki had gone, that they were rid of *that* treasure. It was not till the next day that Yössil was missed; then they said, bother would *not* have taken him, and the beadle lighted the stove himself. The oven smoked and Yössil was talked about the whole day; he was the only one who could manage the stove. They began to wonder if he had gone to Palestine, or else to Argentina? It was true, he had nothing with which to pay his travelling expenses, but then he could always resort to begging.

It was only on the sixth day, when the town was looking for the arrival of an inspector of licenses, that the first shop-keeper who climbed up into the loft to hide a piece of imported velvet found Yössil hanging and already stark.

XI

BONTZYE SHWEIG



## XI

### BONTZYE SHWEIG<sup>1</sup>

Down here, in *this* world, Bontzye Shweig's death made no impression at all. Ask anyone you like who Bontzye was, *how* he lived, and what he died of; whether of heart failure, or whether his strength gave out, or whether his back broke under a heavy load, and they won't know. Perhaps, after all, he died of hunger.

If a tram-car horse had fallen dead, there would have been more excitement. It would have been mentioned in the papers, and hundreds of people would have crowded round to look at the dead animal—even the spot where the accident took place.

But the tramway horse would receive less attention if there were as many horses as men—a thousand million.

Bontzye lived quietly and died quietly. He passed through *our* world like a shadow.

No wine was drunk at Bontzye's circumcision, no healths were proposed, and he made no beautiful speech when he was confirmed. He lived like a little dun-colored grain of sand on the sea-shore, among millions of his kind; and when the wind lifted him and blew him over to the other side of the sea, nobody noticed it.

When he was alive, the mud in the street preserved no impression of his feet; after his death, the wind overturned the little board on his grave. The grave-digger's

<sup>1</sup> Bontzye "mum."

wife found it a long way off from the spot, and boiled a potful of potatoes over it. Three days after that, the grave-digger had forgotten where he had laid him.

If Bontzye had been given a tombstone, then, in a hundred years or so, an antiquarian might have found it, and the name "Bontzye Shweig" would have echoed once again in *our* air.

A shadow! His likeness remained photographed in nobody's brain, in nobody's heart; not a trace of him remained.

"No kith, no kin!" He lived and died alone!

Had it not been for the human commotion, some one might have heard Bontzye's spine snap under its load; had the world been less busy, some one might have remarked that Bontzye (also a human being) went about with two extinguished eyes and fearfully hollow cheeks; that even when he had no load on his shoulders, his head drooped earthward as though, while yet alive, he were looking for his grave. Were there as few men as tramway horses, some one might perhaps have asked: What has happened to Bontzye?

When they carried Bontzye into the hospital, his corner in the underground lodging was soon filled—there were ten of his like waiting for it, and they put it up to auction among themselves. When they carried him from the hospital bed to the dead-house, there were twenty poor sick persons waiting for the bed. When he had been taken out of the dead-house, they brought in twenty bodies from under a building that had fallen in. Who knows how long he will rest in his grave? Who knows how many are waiting for the little plot of ground?

A quiet birth, a quiet life, a quiet death, and a quieter burial.

But it was not so in the *other* world. *There* Bontzye's death made a great impression.

The blast of the great Messianic Shofar sounded through all the seven heavens: Bontzye Shweig has left the earth! The largest angels with the broadest wings flew about and told one another: Bontzye Shweig is to take his seat in the Heavenly Academy! In Paradise there was a noise and a joyful tumult: Bontzye Shweig! Just fancy! Bontzye Shweig!

Little child-angels with sparkling eyes, gold thread-work wings, and silver slippers, ran delightedly to meet him. The rustle of the wings, the tap-tap of the little slippers, and the merry laughter of the fresh, rosy mouths, filled all the heavens and reached to the Throne of Glory, and God Himself knew that Bontzye Shweig was coming.

Abraham, our father, stood in the gate, his right hand stretched out with a hearty greeting, and a sweet smile lit up his old face.

What are they wheeling through heaven?

Two angels are pushing a golden arm-chair into Paradise for Bontzye Shweig.

What flashed so brightly?

They were carrying past a gold crown set with precious stones—all for Bontzye Shweig.

"Before the decision of the Heavenly Court has been given?" ask the saints, not quite without jealousy.

"O," reply the angels, "that will be a mere for-

mality. Even the prosecutor won't say a word against Bontzye Shweig. The case will not last five minutes."

Just consider: Bontzye Shweig!

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When the little angels had met Bontzye in mid-air and played him a tune; when Abraham, our father, had shaken him by the hand like an old comrade; when he heard that a chair stood waiting for him in Paradise, that a crown lay ready for his head, and that not a word would be lost over his case before the Heavenly Court—Bontzye, just as in the other world, was too frightened to speak. His heart sank with terror. He is sure it is all a dream, or else simply a mistake.

He is used to both. He often dreamt, in the other world, that he was picking up money off the floor—there were whole heaps of it—and then he woke to find himself as poor as ever; and more than once people had smiled at him and given him a friendly word and then turned away and spit out.

"It is my luck," he used to think. And now he dared not raise his eyes, lest the dream should vanish, lest he should wake up in some cave full of snakes and lizards. He was afraid to speak, afraid to move, lest he should be recognized and flung into the pit.

He trembles and does not hear the angels' compliments, does not see how they dance round him, makes no answer to the greeting of Abraham, our father, and—when he is led into the presence of the Heavenly Court, he does not even wish it "good morning!"

He is beside himself with terror, and his fright in-

creases when he happens to notice the floor of the Heavenly Courthouse; it is all alabaster set with diamonds. "And my feet standing on it!" He is paralyzed. "Who knows what rich man, what rabbi, what saint they take me for—he will come—and that will be the end of me!"

His terror is such, he never even hears the president call out: "The case of Bontzye Shweig!" adding, as he hands the deeds to the advocate, "Read, but make haste!"

The whole hall goes round and round in Bontzye's eyes, there is a rushing in his ears. And through the rushing he hears more and more clearly the voice of the advocate, speaking sweetly as a violin.

"His name," he hears, "fitted him like the dress made for a slender figure by the hand of an artist-tailor."

"What is he talking about?" wondered Bontzye, and he heard an impatient voice break in with:

"No similes, please!"

"He never," continued the advocate, "was heard to complain of either God or man; there was never a flash of hatred in his eye; he never lifted it with a claim on heaven."

Still Bontzye does not understand, and once again the hard voice interrupts: "No rhetoric, please!"

"Job gave way—this one was more unfortunate—"

"Facts, dry facts!"

"When he was a week old, he was circumcised . . ."

"We want no realism!"

"The Mohel who circumcised him did not know his work—"

"Come, come!"

"And he kept silent," the advocate went on, "even when his mother died, and he was given a step-mother at thirteen years old—a serpent, a vixen."

"Can they mean me after all?" thought Bontzye.

"No insinuations against a third party!" said the president, angrily.

"She grudged him every mouthful—stale, mouldy bread, tendons instead of meat—and *she* drank coffee with cream."

"Keep to the subject," ordered the president.

"She grudged him everything but her finger nails, and his black-and-blue body showed through the holes in his torn and fusty clothes. Winter time, in the hardest frost, he had to chop wood for her, barefoot, in the yard, and his hands were too young and too weak, the logs too thick, the hatchet too blunt. More than once he nearly dislocated his wrist; more than once his feet were nearly frost-bitten, but he kept silent, even to his father."

"To that drunkard?" laughs the accuser, and Bontzye feels cold in every limb.

"He never even complained to his father," finished up the advocate.

"And always alone," he continued, "no playmates, no school, nor teaching of any kind—never a whole garment—never a free moment."

"Facts, please!" reminded the president.

"He kept silent even later, when his father seized him by the hair in a fit of drunkenness, and flung him

out into the street on a snowy winter's night. He quietly picked himself up out of the snow and ran whither his feet carried him.

"He kept silent all the way—however hungry he might be, he only begged with his eyes.

"It was a wild, wet night in spring time, when he reached the great town; he fell like a drop into the ocean, and yet he passed that same night under arrest. He kept silent and never asked why, for what. He was let out, and looked about for the hardest work. And he kept silent. Harder than the work itself was the finding of it—and he kept silent.

"Bathed in a cold sweat, crushed together under heavy loads, his empty stomach convulsed with hunger—he kept silent.

"Bespattered with mud, spat at, driven with his load off the pavement and into the street among the cabs, carts, and tramways, looking death in the eyes every moment—he kept silent.

"He never calculated how many pounds' burden go to a groschen, how many times he fell on an errand worth a dreier; how many times he nearly panted out his soul going after his pay; he never calculated the difference between other people's lot and his—he kept silent.

"And he never insisted loudly on his pay; he stood in the door-way like a beggar, with a dog-like pleading in his eyes—Come again later! and he went like a shadow to come again later, and beg for his wage more humbly than before.

"He kept silent even when they cheated him of part, or threw in a false coin.

"He took everything in silence."

"They mean me after all," thought Bontzye.

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"Once," continued the advocate, after a sip of water, "a change came into his life: there came flying along a carriage on rubber tires drawn by two runaway horses. The driver already lay some distance off on the pavement with a cracked skull. The terrified horses foamed at the mouth, sparks shot from their hoofs, their eyes shone like fiery lamps on a winter's night—and in the carriage, more dead than alive, sat a man.

"And Bontzye stopped the horses. And the man he had saved was a charitable Jew, who was not ungrateful.

"He put the dead man's whip into Bontzye's hands, and Bontzye became a coachman. More than that—he was provided with a wife, and more still—with a child.

"And Bontzye kept silent!"

"Me, they mean me!" Bontzye assured himself again, and yet had not the courage to give a glance at the Heavenly Court.

He listens to the advocate further:

"He kept silent also when his protector became bankrupt and did not pay him his wages.

"He kept silent when his wife ran away from him, leaving him a child at the breast.

"He was silent also fifteen years later, when the child had grown up and was strong enough to throw him out of the house."

"Me, they mean me!" Now he is sure of it.

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"He kept silent even," began the angelic advocate

once more in a still softer and sadder voice, "when the same philanthropist paid all his creditors their due but him—and even when (riding once again in a carriage with rubber tires and fiery horses) he knocked Bontzye down and drove over him.

"He kept silent. He did not even tell the police who had done for him."

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"He kept silent even in the hospital, where one may cry out.

"He kept silent when the doctor would not come to his bedside without being paid fifteen kopeks, and when the attendant demanded another five—for changing his linen.

"He kept silent in the death-struggle—silent in death.

"Not a word against God; not a word against men!

"*Dixi!*"

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Once more Bontzye trembled all over, he knew that after the advocate comes the prosecutor. Who knows what *he* will say?

Bontzye himself had remembered nothing of his life.

Even in the other world he forgot every moment what had happened in the one before. The advocate had recalled everything to his mind. Who knows what the prosecutor will not remind him of?

"Gentlemen," begins the prosecutor, in a voice biting and acid as vinegar—but he breaks off.

"Gentlemen," he begins again, but his voice is milder, and a second time he breaks off.

Then, from out the same throat, comes in a voice that is almost gentle:

"Gentlemen! *He* was silent! I will be silent, too!"

There is a hush—and there sounds in front a new, soft, trembling voice:

"Bontzye, my child," it speaks like a harp, "my dear child Bontzye!"

And Bontzye's heart melts within him. Now he would lift up his eyes, but they are blinded with tears; he never felt such sweet emotion before. "My child!" "My Bontzye!"—no one, since his mother died, had spoken to him with such words in such a voice.

"My child," continued the presiding judge, "you have suffered and kept silent; there is no whole limb, no whole bone in your body, without a scar, without a wound, not a fibre of your soul that has not bled—and you kept silent.

"There they did not understand. Perhaps you yourself did not know that you might have cried out, and that at your cry the walls of Jericho would have shaken and fallen. You yourself knew nothing of your hidden power.

"In the other world your silence was not understood, but *that* is the world of delusion; in the world of truth you will receive your reward.

"The Heavenly Court will not judge you; the Heavenly Court will not pass sentence on you; they will not apportion you a reward. Take what you will! Everything is yours!"

Bontzye looks up for the first time. He is dazzled; everything shines and flashes and streams with light.

"*Taki?*" he asks shyly.

"Yes, really!" answers the presiding judge with decision; "really, I tell you, everything is yours; everything in heaven belongs to you. Because all that shines and sparkles is only the reflection of your hidden goodness, a reflection of your soul. You only take of what is yours."

"*Taki?*" asks Bontzye again, this time in a firmer voice.

"*Taki! taki! taki!*" they answer him from all sides.

"Well, if it is so," Bontzye smiles, "I would like to have every day, for breakfast, a hot roll with fresh butter."

The Court and the angels looked down, a little ashamed; the prosecutor laughed.



XII

THE DEAD TOWN



## XII

### THE DEAD TOWN

When travelling in the provinces after Jewish statistics, I one day met with a Jew dragging himself step by step through the heavy sand. He looks ill, can hardly walk, hardly put one foot before the other. I feel sorry for him and take him into my conveyance. He gets in, gives me a "peace be with you," and asks me every sort of question. I answer, and end by inquiring:

"And you, friend, whence are you?"

"From the dead town," he answers calmly.

I thought he was joking.

"Where is it?" I ask. "Behind the hills of darkness?"

"Where?" he smiles. "It's just in Poland!"

"In our country, a town like that?"

"There it is!" he said; "there it is! Although the nations of the world do not know of it, and have never given it a Gentile name, it is a genuinely Jewish town."

"What do you mean?"

"What I say! You know geography, and you think everything is down in it; not at all. We Jews live without geography. We are not 'down,' and yet they come to us from far and near. What is the good of geography? Every driver knows the way.

"You don't believe me?" he asks.

I am silent.

"And yet it's true; our rabbi corresponds with all the Geonim<sup>1</sup> in the world. Questions and answers concerning the most important matters come and go—everything is arranged somehow—it just depends. Not long ago, for instance, an elderly grass-widow was released from the marriage-tie. Well, of course, the main thing is not the grass-widow, but the dialectics!"<sup>2</sup>

He goes on:

"All the Einiklich<sup>3</sup> know of our town. They come, praise God, often—and, praise God, not in vain."

"It is the first time I ever heard of a dead town."

"That's rather strange! I suppose you keep yourself rather aloof. . . . And yet it is a truly Jewish town, a real Jewish metropolis. It has everything a town needs, even two or three lunatics! And it has a reputation for commerce, too!"

"Is anything taken in or out?"

"What? What do you say?" asks the Jew, not quite clear as to my meaning. "Are you speaking of articles of trade?"

I nod my head.

"Certainly!" he answers. "They take away prayer-scarfs and leather belts, and bring in Corfu Esrogim and earth of Palestine. But that isn't the chief thing, the chief thing is the business done in the town itself!

<sup>1</sup> Men of great learning in the Law.

<sup>2</sup> By which the law is made applicable to an elderly woman.

<sup>3</sup> Grandsons. A celebrated Rebbe would have "sons" and "grandsons" among his adherents. The former would remain, the latter would come and go in companies and more or less respectable conveyances.

Drink-shops, lodging houses for travellers, old clothes—according to custom—”

“A poor town?”

“What do you mean by rich and poor? There is Parnosseh! The very poor go about begging either in the place or in the neighborhood—mostly in the place itself! Whoever holds out a hand is given something! Others try for some easy work, they do broker-business, or pick up things in the streets and earn an honest crust. The Almighty is faithful! The orphans are given free meals by the householders and study in the Talmud Torah. The orphan girls become maid-servants, cooks, or find a living elsewhere. Widows, divorced women, and grass-widows (there have been a lot of grass-widows lately<sup>1</sup>) sit over charcoal braziers, and when the fumes go to their head, they dream that rolls hang on the trees ready baked. Others live *quite* decently!”

“On what?”

“On what? What do other people live on? A poor man hopes; a trader swallows air, and the one who digs—graves, I mean—is never out of employment—”

Is he joking, the dried-up, little, old Jew, the bag-of-bones with the odd gleam in his deeply sunken eyes? On his bony face, covered with a skin like yellow parchment, not the trace of a smile! Only his voice has something odd about it.

“What sort of a town is it, anyway?” I ask again.

<sup>1</sup> Owing to the emigration of the younger men to America in the “bad times.”

"What do you mean? It's a town like any other! There's a Shool, and they say that once there were all sorts of animals painted on the walls, beasts and birds—out of Perek Shirah<sup>1</sup>—and on the ceiling all sorts of musical instruments, such as were played upon by King David, on whom be peace. I never saw it so, but the old men tell of it."

"And nowadays?"

"Nowadays? Dust and spider-webs. There's only a wooden chain, carved out of one piece, that hangs from the beam, and falls very prettily to one side of the Ark to the right of the curtain, which was itself the gift of pious women. Nobody remembers who made the chain, but it was an artist, there's no doubt! Such a chain!"

"In the Shool," he continued, "you see only the common people, artisans, except tailors, who form a congregation apart, and butchers and drivers, who have hired a place of their own to pray in. The Shool can hardly read Hebrew! The well-to-do householders—sons of the Law—assemble in the house-of-study, a large one with piles of books! The Chassidîm, again, pray in rooms apart!"

"And are there dissensions?"

"Many men, many minds! In the grave, on the other hand, there is peace; one burial ground for all; and the men's bath—the women's bath—are there for all alike."

"What else have you in your town?"

<sup>1</sup> "Chapter of Song," a Midrash, found in some editions of the prayer-book.

"What more would you have? There was a refuge for wayfarers, and it was given up; wayfarers can sleep in the house-of-study—at night it's empty—and we have a Hekdesh."

"A hospital, you mean?"

"Not a hospital at all, just a Hekdesh, two rooms. At one time they were occupied by the bather, then it was arranged that the bather should content himself with one room, and that the other should be used for the Hekdesh; there are not more than three sick women in it altogether: one poor thing, an old woman with paralyzed legs, who lies all of a heap; a second with all her limbs paralyzed, and beside these, a crazy grass-widow. Three corners are taken up with beds, in the fourth stands a chimney-stove; in the middle there is a dead-house, in case of need!"

"You are laughing at me, friend," I break in, "that is Tziachnovke! Tziachnovke itself with its commerce and charities and good works! Why do you call it the dead town?"

"Because it is a dead town! I am speaking of a town which, from the day it was built, hung by a hair, and now the hair has snapt, it hangs in the air. It hangs by nothing at all. And because it hangs by nothing and floats in mid-air, it is a dead town; if you like, I will tell you about it."

"By all means—most interesting!"

Meanwhile night is falling, one half of the sky grows blood-red and fiery, over there is the sunset. On our other hand, the moon is swimming into view out of a light mist, like the face of a bride peeping out of her

white veil. The pale beams, as they spread over the earth, mix with the quivering shadows of the sad, still night.

Uncanny!—

We drive into a wood. The moon-rays steal in after us between the trembling leaves.

On the ground, among the fallen leaves and twigs, there dance little circles of light, like silver coins. There is something magical in the illumination, in the low breathing of the wood.

I glance at the wayfaring Jew, his appearance has changed. It is melancholy and serious, and his expression is so simple and honest. Can it all be true?

*Ha!* I will listen to what he has to say.

"The town hung by a hair from the first," said the narrator, "because it was started in a part where no Jewish town was allowed to be! It was not till the first Minyan was complete that people held a meeting and decided to reckon themselves as belonging to a town in the neighborhood. On this pretense they built a bath, a Shool, and after that, a men's bath, and bought a piece of land for a burial ground.

"And when all that was finished, they sent people of backstair influence to have it all endorsed."

"Head downward?"

"Isn't that always the way with us? How should it be otherwise?"

"I don't know!"

"However, that's how it was! And the thing was not so underhand as you suppose.

"There was a Jew who was very rich, and this rich

Jew, as is usually the case, was a little, not to say very much, in with the authorities, and everything was in his name; it was *his* Shool, *his* bath, *his* women's bath—even to *his* burial ground—and nothing was said; as I tell you, he was a person of influence!

“And when the paper came from high quarters, he was to transcribe it in the name of the community and stop paying sop-money to the local police.”

“And then the rich man said: ‘To my account’?”

“No, my dear sir, such rich people didn't exist in those days. ‘To my account’ was a thing unknown; but hear what happened, what things may come to pass!

“It was not the Gevir, but the envoy who caused the trouble. He made off, half-way, with the money and the papers, and left the freshly-baked community like a grass-widow with a family.”

“Did they send another?”

“Not so soon as all that! Before it was known that the first had absconded, or anything about it, the Gevir died and left, among other things, an heir who was a minor; he couldn't sign a paper till he was twenty-one!”

“So they hurried up?”

“Of course, as soon as he was twenty-one, they meant to send another envoy, and perhaps two.”

“And meanwhile it was entered in the communal records?”

“That's where it is! The records remembered and the people forgot! Some say the record was burnt, that the trustee took the record, said Havdoleh over it, set fire to a little brandy, and—good-bye!

“The community, meanwhile, was growing; Jews,

praise God, soon multiply. And they come in from other places; one person brings in a son-in-law, another a daughter-in-law, in a word, it grew. And the Gevir's heirs disappeared as though on purpose! The widow married again and left, one son after another went to seek his fortune elsewhere, to take a look 'round. The youngest remained. Kohol appointed him a guardian and married him, and gave him an experienced partner."

"Who led him about by the nose?"

"According to the law of Moses and of Israel!

"He had trouble with the partner and more still with the wife; and he signed a forged check and took himself off, bankrupt; townspeople and strangers collected and made a great noise, the case was heard in court, down came an inspector, no money to be seen anywhere, the wife hid the furniture, the inspector took possession of the Shool and the burial ground!

"The little town was thunderstruck, it was a bolt from the blue with a vengeance! Because, you see, the whole thing had been kept dark to the last minute!

"And all of a sudden, the community was seen hanging, as it were, by a hair!

"What was to be done? They drove to lawyers. What could they advise in a case like that? The best thing would be to have an auction, the inspector would sell the things and the community buy them at any cost. The community was no community? The papers had been lost by the way? They must find another Gevir, and buy in his name! The great thing was not to wait till the Gevir should die or go away!

"The advice seemed good, Kohol was quite used to loss of money; but there was not only *one* Gevir, there were several! And heaps willing to act as diplomatic envoys. Whose name should they use? Who should be taken for an envoy? All were willing and might be offended. So they held a meeting and talked it over. And they talked it over till the talk became a dispute, and when *we* have a dispute, it isn't settled in a hurry. Now and again it looks like peace, the flame of discord burns low, comes a peacemaker and pours oil on it, and it blazes up again and—blazes on!"

The Jew wiped his pale forehead and continued:

"Meanwhile something happened, something not to be believed!

"Only," he added with a smile, "it is night and the creature who walks the sky at night (he points at the moon) is called 'truth,' and at night, specially in such a quiet one, everything is credible."

"Well, yes"—I allow unwillingly.

"The story is a dreadful one.

"The inspector put his foot on the 'holy ground,' the corpses heard and must have grown angry—the tombstones move—the corpses rise up from beneath them—you believe me?

"I am no heretic," I replied, "heaven forbid! And I believe in the immortality of the soul, only—"

"Only, friend, only?"

"I always thought, that only the soul remained—the soul that flies into heaven; but the body that goes into the grave, the image that decays—anyhow, it cannot move without the soul—cannot rise again."

"Well said!" he praises me. "May I ever hear the like!

"I am glad," he said, "that you are book-learned; but, my friend, you have forgotten the world of illusion! You say the soul goes to heaven, into the sky—very well—but to which part? One goes into Paradise, the other into Gehenna. Paradise is for the souls of the righteous, Gehenna for the souls of the wicked. The one, for his good deeds, receives a share of Leviathan, of Behemoth, wine of the ages,—the other, for his sins, boiling pitch; but that only means reward and punishment, and why reward and punishment? Because so long as a man lives, he has a free choice. If he wishes to do what is good, he does it, if to do evil, he does evil, and as he makes his bed, *ha?* so he lies.

"But what is the sentence passed when a man was no man, when his life was no life, and he did nothing, neither good nor evil, because he could not do anything? He had no choice, and he slept away his life and lived in a dream. What is such a soul entitled to? Gehenna? What for? It never so much as killed a fly. Paradise? For what? It never dipped a hand in cold water to gain it."

"What *does* become of such a soul?"

"Nothing! It goes on living in a world of illusion, it does not detach itself from the body; but just as it dreamt before that it lived *on* the earth, so it dreams now that it lives *in* the earth!

"No one in our town ever really died, because no one ever really lived! No one did either good or evil, there were no sinners and no righteous—only sleepy-heads

and souls in a world of illusion. When such a sleepy-head is laid in the grave, it remains a sleepy-head—only in another lodging—that's all.

“And so dying with us was a perfect comedy! Because if a feather was put under the nose of a *live* man, would he stir to brush it away? Not he! And the same with a fly. They left off troubling about Parnosseh—they simply left off troubling about anything at all!

“So it went on. . . . There are many towns like it, and when it happens, as it has happened with us, that a corpse creeps out of its grave, it doesn't begin to remember that it has made its last confession of sins and drawn its last breath. No sooner have the potsherds fallen from its eyes than it goes straight to the house-of-study, to the bath, or else home to supper—it remembers nothing about having died!”

I do not know if it is the moon's fault, or whether I am not quite myself, but I hear, believe, and even ask:

“Did all the corpses rise? All?”

“Who can tell? Do they keep a register? There may have been a few heretics who thought it was the final resurrection and lay low; but there rose a whole community; they rose and fled before the inspector into the nearest wood!”

“Why into a wood?”

“They couldn't go into the town, because it was daylight, and it is not the thing to appear in winding-sheets by daylight—they might have frightened the young mothers.”

“True. And the inspector?”

“You ask about a Gentile? He saw nothing. Per-

haps he was tipsy—nothing—he did his work, made his inventory.”

“And sold the things?”

“Nothing, there was as yet no one to buy.”

“And the corpses?”

“Ah—the corpses!”

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He rests for a moment and then goes on:

“Hardly had night fallen, when the corpses came back into the town; each one went to his home, stole in at the door, the window, or down the chimney—went hastily to the wardrobe, took out some clothes, dressed himself, yawned, and lay down somewhere to sleep.

“Next morning there was a whole townful of corpses.”

“And the living said nothing?”

“They never remarked; they were taken up with the dispute; their heads were full of it, they were all at sixes and sevens! And really, when you come to think of it, how much difference is there between a dead-alive person and a walking corpse in winding-sheets? When a son saw his father, he spat out three times, indignant with himself: ‘To think of the dream I had—I dreamt I said Kaddish for my father and inherited him! May such dreams plague my enemies.’

“A widow saw her husband, and gave him a hearty slap. He had deceived her, the wretch! made game of her! and she, foolish woman that she was, had made him new winding-sheets!”

“And supposing she had married again?”

"How should she have? In the course of the dispute some one set fire to the Shool and to the house-of-study and to the wedding canopy; everything, you may say, was burnt. They accused pretty well everybody in turn—"

"And after that?"

"Nothing; the corpses had come to life and the living began to die out, for want of room, for want of air—but specially of hunger—"

"Was there a famine?"

"No more than anywhere else! But there *was* one for all that. The corpses took their place at the prayer-meetings and at the table at home as well. People didn't know why, but there were suddenly not enough spoons. All ate out of one dish, and there were not enough spoons. Every house-mistress knows that she has as many spoons as there are people in the house, so she thinks there has been a robbery! The pious say: Witchcraft! But as they came to see the spoons were missing everywhere, and there was not food to go round, then they said: A famine! and they hungered, and they are hungering still."

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"And in a short time the corpses outnumbered the living; now they are the community and the leaders of the community! They do not beget children and increase naturally—not that, but when anyone dies, they steal him away off his bed, out of the grave—and there is a fresh corpse going about the town.

"And what is lacking to them? They have no cares,

no fear of death—they eat for the purpose of saying grace—they don't want the food, they have no craving for it—let alone drink and lodging; a hundred corpses can sleep in one room—they don't require air!

“And they have no worries, because whence do worries spring? From knowing! ‘The more knowledge, the more sorrow, but the dead man does not trouble.’ It's not his affair! He doesn't wish to know and he *needn't* know—he wanders in a world of illusion.

“He keeps away from living concerns; he has no questions, no anxieties, no heart-ache, no one is conscious of his liver!

“Who do you think is our rabbi? Once it was a live man and a man of action; now he, too, is a corpse; he wanders in a world of illusion, and goes on giving decisions by rote as in a dream.

“Who are his assistants? People like him—half-decayed corpses.

“And they solve ritual questions for the living and the dead, they know everything and do everything; they say blessings, unite in wedlock. Who is it stands at the platform? A corpse! He has the face of a corpse, the voice of a corpse; if it happen that a cock crows suddenly, he runs away.

“And the Gevirîm, the almsgivers, the agitators, the providers, the whole lot—what are they? Dead men, long dead and long buried!”

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“And you, friend? What are you?”

“I? I am half-dead,” answers the Jew. He jumps down from the conveyance and disappears among the trees.

XIII

THE DAYS OF THE MESSIAH



### XIII

#### THE DAYS OF THE MESSIAH

As in all the Jewish towns in Galicia, big and little, so in the one where my parents lived, there was a lunatic.

And as in most cases, so in this one, the lunatic was afraid of nobody, neither of Kohol, nor of the rabbi or his assistants, not even of the bather or the grave-digger, who are treated with respect by the richest men. On the other hand, the whole of the little town, Kohol with all the Jewish authorities and the bather and the grave-digger, trembled before the lunatic, closed door and window at his approach. And although the poor lunatic had never said an abusive word, never touched any one with his little finger, everybody called him names, many people hit him, and the street boys threw mud and stones at him.

I always felt sorry for the lunatic. He attracted me, somehow, I wanted to talk to him, to console him, to give him a friendly pat; but it was impossible to approach him; I should have received part of the stones and mud with which he was bombarded by the others. I was quite a little boy, and I wore a nice suit from Lemberg or Cracow, and I wished to preserve my shoulders from stones and my suit from mud; so I remained at a distance.

The little town in which my parents lived and where

I spent my childhood, dressed in clothes made by the tailors of Lemberg and Cracow, was a fortress, surrounded by moats, water, earthworks, and high walls.

On the walls were batteries, and these were protected by soldiers with muskets, who marched up and down, serious and silent. Hardly had darkness fallen, when the iron drawbridge was raised from over the moat, all the gates were closed, and the little town was cut off from the rest of the world till early next morning. At every gate stood a watchman, fully armed.

A short while ago, in the day-time, we were all free, we could go in and out without applying for leave to the major in command; one might bathe in the river outside the town, and even lie stretched out on the green bank and gaze into the sky or out into the wide world, as one chose. No one made any objection, and even if one did not return, no questions were asked. But at night all was to be quiet in the town, no one was to go out or to come in. "Lucky," I used to think to myself, "that they let in the moon."

And as long as I may live, I shall never forget the twilights there, the fall of night. As the shades deepened, a shudder went through the whole town, men and houses seemed suddenly to grow smaller and cower together. The bridge was raised, the iron chains grated against the huge blocks; and the rasp of the iron, the harsh, broken sounds, went through one's very bones. Then gate on gate fell to. Every evening it was the same thing, and yet every evening people's limbs trembled, a dull apathy overspread their faces, and their eyes were as the eyes of the dead. Eye-lids fell heavy

as lead; the heart seemed to stop beating, one scarcely breathed. Then a patrol would march down the streets, with a clatter of trailing swords and great water-boots; the bayonets glistened, and the patrol shouted: "*Wer da?*" To which one had to reply: "A citizen, an inhabitant," otherwise there was no saying what might not happen. Many preferred to remain behind lock and key—they were afraid of being seen in the street.

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One day I had the following adventure: I had been bathing in the river, and either I lost myself in thought, or in staring about, or I simply forgot that after day comes night. Suddenly I see them raise the bridge; there is a grating in the ears, the gates swing to, and my heart goes by leaps and bounds. No help for it! I must pass the night outside the walls—and strange to say, night after night, as I lay in my warm bed at home, I had dreamt of the free world outside the fortress; and now that my dreams had come true, I was frightened. There ensued the usual dispute between head and heart. The head cried: Steady! Now, for once, you may enjoy the free air and the starry sky to the full! And the heart, all the while, struggled and fluttered like a caged bird. Then from heart to head rose as it were a vapor, a mist, and the clear reasoning became obscured, and was swallowed up in the cloud.

There was a rushing noise in my ears, a flickering before my eyes. Every sound, however light, every motion of a twig or a blade of grass made me shudder, and threw me on to the ground with fright.

I hid my face in the sand. Whether or not I slept, and how long I lay there, I cannot tell! But I suddenly heard someone breathing close to me; I spring up and—I am not alone! Two well-known, deep, black eyes are gazing at me in all candor and gentleness.

It is the lunatic.

“What are you doing here?” I ask in smothered tones.

“I never sleep in the town!” he answers sadly, and his glance is so gentle, the voice so brotherly, that I recover myself completely and lose all fear.

“Once upon a time,” I reflected, “lunatics were believed to be prophets—it is still so in the East—and I wonder, perhaps he is one, too! Is he not persecuted like a prophet? Don’t they throw stones at him as at a prophet? Don’t his eyes shine like stars? Doesn’t his voice sound like the sweetest harp? Does he not bear the sorrows of all, and suffer for a whole generation? Perhaps he also knows what shall be hereafter!”

I have a try and begin to question him, and he answers so softly and sweetly, that I think sometimes it is all a dream, the dream of a summer’s night outside the fortress.

“Do you believe in the days of the Messiah?” I ask him.

“Of course!” he answers gently and confidently, “he *must* come!”

“He must?!”

“O, surely! All wait for him, even the heavens and the earth wait! If it were not so, no one would care to live, to dip a hand in cold water—and if people live

as they do and show they *want* to live, it is a sign they all feel that Messiah is coming, that he must come, that he is already on the way."

"Is it true," I question further, "that first there will be dreadful wars, and false Messiahs, on account of whom people will tear one another like wild beasts, till the earth be soaked with blood? Is it true that rivers of blood will flow from east to west and from north to south, and all the animals and beasts drink human blood, all the fields and gardens and wild places and roads be swamped with human blood, and that in the middle of this bloody time the *true* Messiah will come—the *right* one? Is that true?"

"True!"

"And people will know him?"

"Everyone will know him. Nobody will be mistaken. He will be Messiah in every look, in every word, in every limb, in every glance. He will have no armies with him, he will ride on no horse, and there will be no sword at his side—"

"Then, what?"

"He will have wings—Messiah will have wings, and then everyone will have wings. It will be like this: suddenly there will be born a child with wings, and then a second, a third, and so it will go on. At first people will be frightened, by degrees they will get used to it, until there has arisen a whole generation with wings, a generation that will no longer struggle in the mud over a Parnosseh-worm."

He talked on like this for some time, but I had already ceased to understand him. Only his voice was

so sadly-sweet that I sucked it up like a sponge. The day was breaking when he ceased—they had opened the gates and were letting down the bridge.

Since the night spent outside the fortress, the life within it had grown more unbearable still. The old walls, the rasping iron drawbridge, the iron doors, the sentinels and patrols, the hoarsely-angry "*Wer da?*" the falsely-servile: "A citizen, an inhabitant!" the eternal quivering of the putty-colored faces, the startled, half-extinguished eyes, the market with its cowering, aimlessly restless shadows of men—the whole thing weighed on me like lead—not to be able to breathe, not to feel free! And my heart grew sick with a great longing. And I resolved to go to meet the Messiah.

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I got into the first conveyance that presented itself. The driver turned round and asked:

"Where to?"

"Wherever you please," I answered, "only a great way—a great way off from here!"

"For how long?"

"For as long as the horse can go!"

The driver gathered up the reins, and we set off.

We drove on and on. Other fields, other woods, other villages, other towns, everything different; but the difference was only on the surface, below that everything was the same. When I looked into things, I saw everywhere the same melancholy, every face wore a look of frightened cunning, speech was everywhere broken and halting—the world seemed overspread with a mournful

mist that hid every gleam of light and extinguished every joy. Everything shrank together and stifled. And I kept shouting: "Go on!" But I depended on the driver, and the driver, on the horse—the horse wants to eat, and we are obliged to stop.

I step into the inn. A large room, divided into two by means of an old curtain, reaching from one wall to the other. On my side of the curtain, three men sit round a large table. They do not remark me, and I have time to look them over. They represent three generations. The oldest is gray as a pigeon, but he sits erect and gazes with sharp eyes and without spectacles into a large book, lying before him on the table. The old face is grave, the old eyes unerring in their glance, and the old man and the book are blent into one by the white beard, whose silver points rest on the pages. At his right hand sits a younger man, who must be his son; it is the same face, only younger, less unmoved, more nervous, at times more drawn and weary. He also gazes into a book, but through glasses. The book is smaller, and he holds it nearer to his eyes, resting it against the edge of the table. He is of middle age; beard and ear-locks just silvered over. He rocks himself to and fro. It seems every time as if his body wished to tear itself away from the book, only the book draws it back. He rocks himself, and the lips move inaudibly. Every now and then he glances at the old man, who does not notice it.

To the old man's left sits the youngest, probably a grandson, a young man with glossy black hair and a burning, restless glance. He also is looking at a book,

but the book is quite small, and he holds it close to his bright, unquiet eyes. He continually lowers it, however, and throws a glance of mingled fear and respect at the old man, another, with a half-ironic smile, at his father, and then leans over to hear what is going on, on the further side of the curtain. And from the further side of the curtain come moans as of a woman in childbirth—

I am about to cough, so that they may be aware of me. At this moment a fold of the curtain is pushed aside and there appear two women: an old one with a sharp, bony face and sharp eyes, and one of middle age with a gentle, rather flabby face and uncertain glance. They stand looking at the men, and waiting to be questioned. The oldest does not see them—his soul has melted into the soul of the book. The middle-aged man has seen them, and is wondering how best to rouse his father; the youngest starts up—

“Mother! Grandmother! Well?”

The father rises anxiously from his chair; the grandfather only pushes the book a little away from him, and lifts his eyes to the women.

“How is she?” inquires the young one further, with a trembling voice.

“She is over it!”

“Over it! over it!” stammers the young one.

“Mother, won’t you say, Good luck to you?” asks the second. The old one reflects a moment and then asks:

“What has happened? Even if it is a girl—”

"No!"—the grandmother speaks for the first time—  
"it is a boy."

"Still-born?"

"No, it lives!" answers the old woman, and yet there is no joy in her tone.

"A cripple? Defective?"

"It has marks! On both shoulders—"

"What sort of marks?"

"Of wings—"

"Of wings?"

"Yes, of wings, and they are growing—"

The old man remains sitting in perplexity, the second is lost in wonder, the youngest fairly leaps for joy.

"Good, good! Let them grow, may they grow into wings, big, strong ones! Good, good!"

"What is there to be glad about?" inquires his father.

"A dreadful deformity!" sighs the old man.

"Why so?" asks the grandson.

"Wings," said the old man, sternly, "raise one into the height—when one has wings one cannot keep to the earth."

"Much it matters!" retorts the grandson, defiantly. "One is quit of living here and wallowing in the mud, one lives in the height. Is heaven not better than earth?"

The old man grows pale, and the son takes up the word:

"Foolish child! What is one to live on in the height? Air doesn't go far. There are no inns to hire up there,

no 'contracts' to sign. There's no one of whom to buy a bit of shoe-leather—in the height—"

The old man interrupts him: "In the height," he says in hard tones, "there is no Shool, no house-of-study, no Kläus to pray and read in; in the height, there is no pathway, trodden out by past generations—in the height, one wanders and gets lost, because one does not know the road. One is a free bird, but woe to the free bird in the hour of doubt and despondency!"

"What do you mean?" and the young man starts up with burning cheeks and eyes.

But the grandmother is beforehand with him:

"What fools men are," she exclaims, "how they talk! And the rabbi? Do you suppose the rabbi is going to let him be circumcised? Is he likely to allow a blessing to be spoken over a child with wings?"

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I give a start. The night spent outside the town, the drive, and the child with wings were all a dream.

XIV

KABBALISTS



## XIV

### KABBALISTS

When times are bad, even Torah, "the best ware,"<sup>1</sup> loses in value.

In the Lashewitz "academy," there remain only the head, Reb Yainkil, and one pupil.

The head of the academy is an old, thin Jew, with a long, pointed beard and old, extinguished eyes; Lemech, his beloved pupil, is a young man, likewise thin, tall, and pale, with black, curling ear-locks, dark, glowing eyes, heavily-ringed, dry lips, and sharp, quivering throat; both with garments open at the breast, with *no* shirts, and both in rags; the teacher just drags about a pair of peasant boots; the pupil's shoes drop from his sockless feet.

That is all that remains of the celebrated academy!

The impoverished little town sent less and less food, gave fewer and fewer free meals to the poor students, and these crept away elsewhere! But Reb Yainkil intends to die here, and his pupil remains to close his eyelids!

And these two are often hungry. Eating little means sleeping little, and whole nights without sleep or food incline one to the Kabbalah! If one has to wake whole

<sup>1</sup> "Töre is die beste S'chöre." From a Yiddish cradle-song.

nights and hunger whole days, one may as well get something by it, if only fasting and flagellations, so long as these open the door to the world of mystery, of spirits, and of angels!

And they have been studying the Kabbalah for some time!

Now they are sitting at the one long table. With everyone else it is "after dinner," with them still "before breakfast." They are used to that. The teacher rolls his eyes and holds forth; the pupil sits with both hands supporting his head and listens.

"Therein," said the teacher, "are many degrees of attainment: one knows a bit of a tune, another half a one, another a whole. The Rebbe of blessed memory knew a whole one with the accompaniment. I," he added sadly, "have only been found worthy of a bit like that!"

He measured off a tiny piece of his bony finger and went on:

"There is one kind of tune that must have words, that is a low order of tune. But there is a higher kind: a tune that sings itself, but without words—a pure melody! But *that* melody must have a voice—and lips, through which the voice issues! And lips, you see, are material things!

"And the voice itself is refined matter, certainly, but matter none the less. Let us say, the voice stands midway between the spiritual and the material.

"However that may be, the tune that finds expression through a voice and is dependent on lips is not pure, not entirely pure, not yet really spiritual!

"The real tune sings itself without a voice—it sings itself inside one, in the heart, in the thoughts!

"There you have the meaning of the words of King David: 'All my bones shall say,' etc. It ought to sing in the marrow of the bones, that is where the tune should be—that is the highest praise we can give to God. That is no human tune that has been *thought out*! It is a fragment of the melody to which God created the world, of the soul He breathed into it. Thus sings the Heavenly Family, thus sang the Rebbe, whose memory be blessed!"

The teacher was interrupted by a shock-headed lad with a cord round his waist—a porter. He came into the house-of-study, put down on the table, beside the teacher, a dish of porridge with a piece of bread, said gruffly: "Reb Tebil sends the teacher some food," turned his back, and added, as he went out: "I'll come back presently for the dish."

Recalled by the rough tone from the divine harmonies, the teacher rose heavily, and went to the basin to wash, dragging his great boots.

He continued to speak as he went, but with less assurance, and the pupil followed him with greedy ears and glowing, dreaming eyes.

"But I," repeated Reb Yainkil, sadly, "was not even worthy of understanding to what category it belongs, of knowing under what heading it is classified. However," he added with a smile, "the initiatory mortifications and purifications, those I *do* know, and perhaps I will teach them you to-day."

The pupil's eyes seem about to start from their sockets with eagerness; he keeps his mouth open so as to catch every word. But the teacher is silent, he is washing his

hands; he repeats the ritual formula, comes back to the table and says "Thou who bringest forth,"<sup>1</sup> with trembling lips.

He lifts the dish with shaking fingers, and the warm steam rises into his face; then he puts it down, takes the spoon in his right hand, and warms the left at the dish's edge; after which he masticates the rest of the bread with some salt between his tongue and his toothless gums.

Having warmed his face with his hands, he wrinkles his forehead, purses his thin lips, and begins to blow the porridge.

The pupil has not taken his eyes off him the whole time, and when the teacher's trembling mouth met the spoonful of porridge, something came over him, and he covered his face with both hands and withdrew within himself.

A few minutes later another boy came in with a bowl of porridge and some bread:

"Reb Yòsef sends the pupil some breakfast!"

But the pupil did not remove his hands from his face.

The teacher laid down his spoon and went up to the pupil. For a while he gazed at him with affectionate pride, then he wrapped his hand in the skirt of his kaftan, and touched him on the shoulder:

"They have brought you something to eat," he said gently, by way of rousing him. Slowly and sadly the pupil uncovered his face. It was paler than ever, and the black-ringed eyes had grown wilder.

"I know, Rebbe," he answered, "but I will not eat anything to-day."

<sup>1</sup> Hebrew blessing before eating bread.

"The fourth fast?" asked the teacher, wondering, "and without me?" he added, with a playful pretense at being hurt.

"It is another kind of fast," answered the pupil, "it is a penance."

"What do you mean? *You* and a penance?"

"Yes, Rebbe! A penance. A minute ago, when you began to eat, I was tempted to break the commandment: 'Thou shalt not covet!'"

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Late that night the pupil woke the teacher. They slept on the benches in the Kläus, opposite to one another.

"Rebbe, Rebbe!" he called in a weak voice.

"What is it?" and the teacher started up in alarm.

"Just now I attained to a higher degree!"

"How so?" inquired the teacher, still half asleep.

"It sang within me!"

The teacher sat up:

"How so? how so?"

"I don't know myself, Rebbe," replied the pupil in his feeble tones, "I couldn't sleep, and I thought over what you told me. I wanted to get to know the tune—and I was so sorrowful, because I could not, that I began to weep—everything in me wept; all my limbs wept before the Creator.

"Then I made the invocations you taught me—and, wonderful to say, not with my lips, but somehow inside me—with my whole self. Suddenly it grew light; I shut my eyes, and still it was light to me, very light, brilliantly light."

"There!" and the teacher sat bending toward him.

"And I had such pleasant feelings as I lay in the light, and I seemed to weigh nothing at all, no more than if my body had been a feather, I felt as if I could fly."

"You see, you see!"

"Then I felt merry and lively, I wanted to laugh—my face never moved, nor my lips either, and yet I laughed—and so heartily."

"You see, you see, you see!"

"Then there was a humming inside me like the beginning of a melody."

The teacher sprang down from his bench, and was across the room.

"Well, well?"

"Then I heard something begin to sing within me."

"What did you feel like? Tell me quick!"

"I felt as though all the doors of sense in me were shut, and as though something sang within me—as it ought to do—without any words, like . . . like . . ."

"How was it? How was it?"

"No, I can't! I knew, before—and then the singing turned into—into—"

"Into what? What became of it?"

"A kind of playing—as though (lehavdîl) there were a fiddle inside me—or as if Yoneh, the musician, were sitting there and playing hymns, as he does at the Rebbe's dinner-table. Only it was better, more beautiful, more spiritual. And without a voice, without any voice at all—it was *all* spiritual."

"Happy, happy, happy, are you!"

"Now it's all gone (sadly), the doors of sense are reopened, and I am so tired, I am so—so—*tired*, that I—

"Rebbe!" he called out suddenly, clapping a hand to his heart, "Rebbe, say the confession of sins with me! They have come for me! They have come for me! There is a singer wanted in the Heavenly Family! An angel with white wings! Rebbe, Rebbe! Hear, O Israel! Hear, O Is—"

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The entire little town wished as one man that it might die as blessed a death; but the Rebbe was not satisfied.

"Another fast or two," he groaned, "and he would have died beneath the Divine kiss!"<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> According to the Talmudic legend like Moses and other saints.



XV

TRAVEL-PICTURES



## XV

### TRAVEL-PICTURES

#### PREFACE

It was at the end of the good, and the beginning of the bad, years. Black clouds had appeared in the sky, but it was believed that the wind<sup>1</sup>—the spirit of the times, I mean—would soon disperse them, that they would pour out their heart somewhere in the wilderness.

In Europe's carefully-tended vineyard the bitter root was already cleaving the sod and sending out prickly, poisonous shoots, but look, look! now the gardener will see it and tear it out root and all. That was the idea. It was supposed that the nineteenth century had caught a cold, a feverish chill, in its old age. That it would end in a serious illness, a fit of insanity, never occurred to anyone.

How far away America was for us in those days! Not a Jew troubled himself as to what a plate of porridge looked like over there, or wondered whether people wore their skull-caps on their feet. Palestinian Esrogîm were as seldom mentioned as Barons Hirsch and Edward de Rothschild.<sup>2</sup>

Astronomy calculates beforehand every eclipse of the sun or moon. Psychology is not so advanced. The

<sup>1</sup> Rúach, Hebrew for wind and spirit both.

<sup>2</sup> Who stand for colonization in Argentina and Palestine, respectively.

world-soul grows suddenly dark, the body is seized with a sort of convulsion, and science cannot foretell the hour—the thing is difficult enough to believe in after it has happened—it is not to be explained. And yet people were uneasy—rumor followed rumor from every side.

It was resolved, among other things, to inquire into the common, workaday Jewish life, to find out what went on in the little towns, what men were hoping for, how they made a living, what they were about, what the people said.

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#### TRUST

My first halting-place was Tishewitz. I took lodgings with an acquaintance, Reb Bòruch. He sent for the beadle and a few householders.

While I was waiting for them, I stood by the window and looked at the market-place. The market-place is a large square bounded on each side by a row of grimy, tumbledown houses, some roofed with straw, but the majority, with shingle. All are one-storied with a broad veranda supported by rotten beams.

Pushing out from the veranda and not far apart, one from the other, stand the huckstresses over the stalls with rolls, bread, peas, beans, and various kinds of fruit.

The market-women are in a state of great commotion. I must have impressed them very much.

“Bad luck to you!” screams one, “don’t point at him with your finger; he can see!”

“Hold your tongue!”

The women know that I have come to take notes in writing. They confide the secret one to another so softly that I overhear every word, even inside the house.

"They say it is he himself!"

"It is a good thing the poor sheep have shepherds who are mindful of them. All the same, if *that* Shepherd<sup>1</sup> did not help, much good it would be!"

"One cannot understand why *that* Shepherd should require such messengers" (in allusion to my shaven beard and short-skirted coat).

Another is more liberal in her views, and helps herself out of the difficulty by means of the Röfeh.

"Take a Röfeh," she says, "he is likewise a heretic, and yet he also is permitted—"

"That is another thing altogether, he is a private individual, but is it so hard to find good Jews for public affairs?"

"They'd better," opines another, "have sent a few hundred rubles. They might let the writing be and welcome, even though my son were *not* made a general!"<sup>2</sup>

Sitting at the table, I saw without being seen. I was hidden from the street, but I could see half the market-place. Meantime, mine host had finished his prayers, put off Tallis and Tefillin, poured out a little brandy, and drunk my health in it.

"Long life and peace to you!" he said.

I answer, "God send better times and Parnosseh!"

<sup>1</sup> God.

<sup>2</sup> They have understood that the writer's mission is connected with the matter of Jewish recruits.

I envy my host—Parnosseh is all he wants.

He adds impressively:

“And there will *have* to be Parnosseh! Is there not a God in the world? And the ‘good Jews’ will pray and do what they can.”

I interrupt him and ask why, although he has confidence in his own business, although he knows quite well “He who gives life gives food”—why he exerts himself so, and lies awake whole nights thinking: To-morrow, later, this time next year. Hardly has a Jew put on his wedding garments, when he begins to think how to buy others for his children—and then, when it comes to All-Israel, his trust is so great that it does not seem worth while to dip one’s hand in cold water for it—why is this?”

“That,” he says, “is something quite different. All-Israel is another thing. All-Israel is God’s affair—God is mindful of it, and then, in case there should be forgetfulness before the throne of His glory, there are those who will remind Him. But as for private affairs, that’s a different matter. Besides, how much longer can the misery of Israel last? It *must* come to an end some time, either because the measure of guilt is full, or the measure of merit is full. But Parnosseh is quite another thing!”

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#### ONLY GO!

I forgot to tell you that the rabbi of the little town would neither come to see me nor allow me to visit him.

He sent to tell me that it was not his business, that he

was a poor, weakly creature, besides which he had been sitting now for several weeks over a knotty question of "meat in milk," and then, the principal thing, he was at loggerheads with Kohol, because they would not increase his salary by two gulden a week.

There came, however, three householders and two beadles.

I began with mine host. He has no wife, and before I could put in a word, he excused himself for it by asking, "How long do you suppose she has been dead?" lest I should reproach him for not having found another to fill her place.

Well, to be brief, I set him down a widower, three sons married, one daughter married, two little boys and one little girl at home.

And here he begs me at once to put down that all the sons—except the youngest, who is only four years old "and Messiah will come before *he* is liable to serve"—that all the others are defective<sup>1</sup> in one way or other.

With the exception of the two eldest sons, I already know the whole family.

The married daughter lives in her father's house and deals in tobacco, snuff, tea, and sugar; also, in foodstuffs; also, I think, in rock-oil and grease. I had bought some sugar of her early that morning. She is about twenty-eight years old. A thin face, a long hooked nose that seems to be trying to count the black and decaying teeth in her half-opened mouth, cracked, blue-gray lips—her father's image. Her sister, a young girl, is like her; but

<sup>1</sup> Unfit for military service.

she has "Kallah-Chen,"<sup>1</sup> her face is fresher and pinker, the teeth whiter, and altogether she is not so worn and neglected-looking. I also see the two little boys—pretty little boys—they must take after their mother: red cheeks, and shy, restless eyes; their twisted black curls are full of feathers; but they have ugly ways: they are always shrugging their little shoulders and writhing peevishly. They wear stuff cloaks, dirty, but whole.

The mother cannot have died more than a short time ago, long enough for the cloaks to get dirty, not long enough for them to be torn. Who is there to look after them now? The eldest sister has four children, a husband who is a scholar, and the shop—the little Kallah maiden serves her father's customers at the bar; the father himself has no time.

"What is your business?" I ask him.

"Percentage."

"Do you mean usury?"

"Well, call it usury, if you like. It doesn't amount to anything either way. Do you know what?" he exclaims, "take all my rubbish and welcome, bills of exchange, deeds—everything for twenty-five per cent, only pay me in cash. I will give up the usury, even the public house! Would to God I could get away to Palestine—but give me the cash! Take the whole concern and welcome! You imagine that we live on usury—it lives on us! People don't pay in, the debt increases. The more it increases, the less it's worth, and the poorer am I, upon my faith!"

Before going out to take further notes, I witness a

<sup>1</sup> "Bride"-grace, girlish charm.

little scene. While I was taking up all my things, paper, pencil, cigarettes, Reb Bòruch was buttering bread for the children to take with them to Cheder. They had each two slices of bread and butter and a tiny onion as a relish.

"Now go!" he says; he does not want them in the public house. But the little orphan is not satisfied. He hunches his shoulders and pulls a wry face preparatory to crying. He feels a bit ashamed, however, to cry before me, and waits till I shall have gone; but he cannot tarry so long and gives vent to a wail:

"Another little onion," he wants. "Mother always gave me two!"

The sister has come running into the tap-room, she has caught up another onion and gives it to him. "Go!" says she also, but much more gently.

The mother's voice sounded in her words.

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#### WHAT SHOULD A JEWESS NEED?

We go from house to house, from number to number. I can see for myself which houses are inhabited by Jews and which by non-Jews; I have only to look in the window. Dingy windows are a sure sign of "Thou hast chosen us," still more so broken panes replaced by cushions and sacking. On the other hand, flower-pots and curtains portray the presence of those who have no such right to poverty as the others.

One meets with exceptions—here lives, *not* a Jew, but a drunkard—and here again—flowers and curtains, but they read *Hazefirah*.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A Hebrew newspaper.

The worst impression I receive is that made upon me by a great, weird, wooden house. It is larger, but blacker and dirtier than all the other houses. The frontage leans heavily over and looks down upon its likeness—also an old, blackened ruin—upon an old, dried up, bent and tottering Jewess, who is haggling with her customer—a sallow, frowzy maid-servant—over an addition to a pound of salt. The beadle points the old woman out to me:

“That is the mistress of the house.”

I was astonished: the Jewess is too poor for such a house.

“The house,” explains the beadle, “is not exactly hers. She pays only one-sixth of the rent—she is a widow—but the heirs, her children, do not live here—so she is called the mistress.”

“How much does the house bring in?”

“Nothing at all.”

“And it’s worth?”

“About fifteen hundred rubles.”

“And nothing is made by it?”

“It stands empty. Who should live there?”

“How do you mean, who?”

“Well, just who? Nearly everybody here has his own house, and if any one hires a lodging, he doesn’t want to have to heat a special room. The custom here is for a tenant to pay a few rubles a year for the heating of a corner. Who wants such large rooms?”

“Why did they build such a house?”

“*Ba!*—once upon a time! It isn’t wanted nowadays.”

“Poor thing.”

"Why 'poor thing?' She has a stall with salt, earns a few rubles a week. Out of that she pays twenty-eight rubles a year house-tax and lives on the rest—what should a Jewess need? What can she want more? She has her winding-sheet."

I gave another look at the old woman, and really it seemed to me that she was not in need of anything. Her wrinkled skin appeared to smile at me: What should a Jewess need?

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NO. 42

I went from house to house in their order of number, with a note-book in my hand. But from No. 41 the beadle led me to 43.

"And 42?" I ask.

"There!" and he points to a ruin in a narrow space between 43 and 41.

"Fallen in?"

"Pulled down," answers the beadle.

"Why?"

"On account of a fire-wall."

I did not understand what he meant.

We were both tired with walking, and we sat down on a seat at the street side.

The beadle explained:

"You see—according to law, if one house is not built far enough away from another, the roofs must be separated by a fire-wall. What the distance has to be, I don't know; *their* laws are incomprehensible; I should say, four ells or more.

“A fire-wall is with them a charm against fire. Well, this house was built by a very poor man, Yeruchem Ivànovker, a teacher, and he couldn't afford a fire-wall.

“Altogether, to tell the truth, he built without a foundation, and out of that, as you will hear presently, there came a lawsuit, at which his wife (peace be upon her) told the whole story, beginning after the custom of women-folk with the sixth day of creation. This is how it happened:

“Malkah had not spoken to her husband for about fifteen years. She was naturally a sour-tempered woman,—God forgive me for talking against the dead,—tall and thin, dark, with a pointed nose like a hook. She rarely said a word not relating to Parnosseh—she was a huckstress—and nobody wanted her to do so. Her look was enough to freeze you to the bone. All the other huckstresses trembled before her—there was an expression in her eye. So, you see, Yeruchem was quite content that she should be silent—*he* never said a word to *her*, either.

“For all this silence, however, they were blessed with two boys and three girls.

“But the desire to become householders made them conversational. The conversation was on this wise:

“‘Malke!’ (No answer.)

“‘Malke!’ (No answer.)

“He Malke's and she doesn't stir.

“But Yeruchem stands up and gives a shout:

“‘Malke, I am going to build a house!’

“Malke could resist no longer, she raised an eye, and opened her mouth.

“‘I thought,’ she said afterward, ‘that he had gone mad.’

“And it *was* a madness. He had inherited the narrow strip of land you have seen from a great-grandfather, and not a farthing in money. The wife’s trash, which was afterwards sold for fifty-four gulden, used to be in pawn the whole year round, except on Sabbaths and holidays, when Yeruchem took them out on tick.

“When the desire calls the imagination to its help—who shall withstand?

“No sooner has he a house, than all good things will follow.

“People will place confidence in him, and he will borrow money to buy a goat, and there will be plenty in the home. He will let out one room as a drink-shop, and he, God helping, will keep it himself. Above all, the children will be provided for. The little boys shall be sent one way or the other to a rabbinical college, the girls shall be given a deed as their dowry, promising them, after his death, half as much as the boys will get, and the thing’s done.

“‘And how is the building to be paid for?’

“He had an answer ready:

“‘I,’ said he, ‘am a teacher, and thou art a huckstress, so we have two Parnossehs: let us live on one Parnosseh, and build on the other.’

“‘Was there ever such an idiot! We can’t make both ends meet as it is!’

“‘God helps those who help themselves,’ said he, ‘here’s a proof of it: the teacher, Noah, our neigh-

bor, has a sickly wife, who earns nothing, and six little children, and it seems they are well and strong—and he lives on nothing but his teaching.’

“ ‘There you are again! He is a great teacher, his pupils are the children of gentlefolk.’

“ ‘And why do you think it is so? What is the reason? Can he “learn” better than I do? Most certainly not. But God, blessed be His Name, seeing that he has only one Parnosseh, increases it to him. And then, another example: Look at Black Brocheh! A widow with five children and nothing but a huckstress—’

“ ‘Listen to him! *That* one (would it might be said of me!) has a fortune in the business, at least thirty rubles—’

“ ‘That is not the thing,’ he gives her to understand, ‘the thing is that the blessing can only reach her through the apples. The Creator governs the world by the laws of nature.’

“ ‘And he manages also to persuade her that they can economize in many ways—one can get along—

“ ‘And so it was decided: Yeruchem gave up taking snuff, and the entire household, sour milk in particular and supper in general—and they began to build.

“ ‘They built for years, but when it came to the fire-wall, Malkah had no wares, Yeruchem had no strength left in him, the eldest son had gone begging through the country, the youngest had died, and there was a fortune wanting—forty rubles for a fire-wall.

“ ‘Well, what was to be done? A coin or two changed hands, and they moved into the new house without building a fire-wall.’”

He took possession with rejoicing. He was a member of the Burial Society, and the community gave him a house-warming. They drank, without exaggeration, a whole barrel of beer, besides brandy and raisin-wine. It was a regular flare-up, a glorification.

But the bliss was short-lived.

A certain householder quarrelled with a neighbor of Yeruchem, with Noah the teacher. Now Noah the teacher had once been a distinguished householder, a very rich man. Besides what he had inherited from his father, he disposed of a few tidy hundreds. He had carried on a business in honey. Afterwards, when there was the quarrel relating to the Lithuanian rabbi, they got his son taken for a soldier (he is serving in the regiment to this day, with a bad lung), and he himself got involved in a lawsuit for having burnt out the rabbi.

Well, it was a great crime. One is used to denouncing, but to heap sticks round a house on all sides and set fire to it, that's a wicked thing.

Whether or not he had anything to do with it, the lawsuit and the son together impoverished him completely, and he became a teacher. Being so new to the work, he hadn't the knack of getting on with the parents, one of them took offense at something, removed his child, and sent him to Yeruchem instead.

Noah was deeply wounded, but he was a man of high courage; he hung day and night about the office of the district commissioner, and used both his tongue and his pen. Well, in due time, up came the matter of the fire-wall, and down came the senior inspector.

Noah meantime had been seized with remorse. He did all he could to prevent the affair from being car-

ried on. A coin or two changed hands, and the affair was hushed up.

All might yet have been well, but for a fresh dispute about "blue." Yeruchem was a Radziner,<sup>1</sup> and wore blue "fringes,"<sup>2</sup> and Noah, a rabid Belzer,<sup>1</sup> called down vengeance.

The dispute grew hotter, up crops the fire-wall, and the law was called in a second time.

There was a judgment given in default, and the court decided that Yeruchem should erect a fire-wall within a month's time, otherwise—the house was to be taken to pieces.

There wasn't a dreier. This time Noah had no remorse; on the contrary, the quarrel was at its height, and there was nothing to be done with him. Yeruchem sent to call him before the rabbi, and he sent the beadle flying out of the house.

When Malkah saw that there was no redress to be had, she seized Noah by the collar in the street, and dragged him to the rabbi like a murderer.

There was a marketful of Belzers about, but who is going to fight a woman? "He who is murdered by women," says the Talmud, "has no judge and no avenger." Noah's wife followed cursing, but was afraid to interfere. At the rabbi's, Malkah told the whole story from beginning to end, and demanded either that Noah should build the fire-wall, or else that the matter should be dropped again.

Our rabbi knew very well that whichever party he

<sup>1</sup> Followers of the Rebbes of Radzin and Belz, respectively.

<sup>2</sup> To his prayer-scarf. See Num. xv. 38.

declared to be right, the Chassidîm on the *other* side would be at him forthwith, and he wormed himself out of the difficulty like the learned Jew that he was. *He* couldn't decide—it was a question of the impulse to do harm—*bê-mê*. There was no decision possible—the case must be laid before the Rebbes.<sup>1</sup>

Noah naturally preferred the Belzer Rebbe, Yeruchem had no choice, and to Belz they went.

Yeruchem, before he left, made his brother-in-law his representative, and trusted him with a few rubles which he had borrowed (people lent them out of pity).

But it all turned out badly.

The brother-in-law spent the money on himself, or (as he averred) lost it—Malkah fell ill of worry.

Yeruchem, it is true, gained his fire-wall with “costs,” before the Rebbe, but he and Noah were both caught on the frontier,<sup>2</sup> and brought home with the *étape*.<sup>3</sup>

When Yeruchem arrived, Malkah was dead, and the little house pulled down.

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#### THE MASKIL

And don't imagine Tishewitz to be the world's end. It has a Maskil, too, and a real Maskil, one of the old

<sup>1</sup> The plaintiff must take action in the place of domicile of the defendant.

<sup>2</sup> Belz being in Austrian Poland. There were two famous Rebbes of Belz in the last century; the second died in 1894. It has been asserted that thirty thousand Jews followed him to his grave.

<sup>3</sup> For having no passports.

style, of middle age, uneducated and unread, without books, without even a newspaper, in a word a mere pretense at a Maskil.

He lets his beard grow. To be a Maskil in Tishewitz it is enough only to trim it, but they say "he attends to his hair during the ten Days of Penitence!"

He is not dressed German fashion, and no more is the Feldscher, also a Jew in a long coat and ear-locks.

Our Maskil stops at blacking his boots and wearing a black ribbon round his neck. He has only sorry remnants of ear-locks, but he wears a peaked cap.

People simply say: "Yeshurun waxed fat and kicked."

He does well, runs a thriving trade, has, altogether, three children—what more can he want? Being free of all care, he becomes a Maskil.

On the strength of what he is a Maskil, it is hard to tell—enough that people should consider him one!

The whole place knows it, and he confesses to it himself. He is chiefly celebrated for his "Wörtlech," is prepared to criticise anything in heaven or on earth.

As I heard later, the Maskil took me for another Maskil, and was sure that I should lodge with him, or, at any rate, that he would be my first entry.

"For work of that kind," he said to the others, "you want people with brains. What do you suppose he could do with the like of *you*?"

And as the mountain did not go to Mohammed, because he had never heard of him, Mohammed went to the mountain.

He found me in the house of a widow. He came in

with the question of the wicked child in the Haggadah:

"What business is this of yours?"

"*Mòì Pànyiye!*<sup>1</sup> what are you doing here?"

"How here?" I ask.

"Very likely you think I come from under the stove? That because a person lives in Tishewitz, he isn't civilized, and doesn't know what is doing in the world? You remember: "I have sojourned with Laban?"<sup>2</sup> I do live here, but when there's a rat about, I soon smell him."

"If you can smell a rat, and know all that is going on, why do you want to ask questions?"

The beadle pricked up his ears, and so did the half-dozen loungers who had followed me step by step.

There was a fierce delight in their faces, and on their foreheads was written the verse: "Let the young men arise"—let us see two Maskilim having it out between them!

"What is the good of all this joking?" said the Maskil, irritated. "My tongue is not a shoe-sole! And for whose benefit am I to speak? That of the Tishewitz donkeys? Look at the miserable creatures!"

I feel a certain embarrassment. I cannot well take up the defense of Tishewitz, because the Tishewitz worthies in the window and the door-way are smiling quite pleasantly.

"Come, tell me, what does it all mean, taking notes?"

"Statistics!"

<sup>1</sup> Sir, my lord. Polish.

<sup>2</sup> And still Jacob did not become like Laban. A Midrash, a rabbinical amplification of the Biblical text.

"*Statistic-shmistik!* We've heard that before. What's the use of it?"

I explained—not exactly to *him*, but to the community, so that they should all have an idea of what statistics meant.

"Ha-ha-ha!" laughs the Maskil loudly and thickly, "you can get the Tishewitz donkeys to believe that, but you won't get me! Why do you want to put down how a person lives, with a floor, without a floor! What does it matter to you if a person lives in a room without a floor? *Ha?*"

It matters, I tell him, because people want to show how poor the Jews are; they think—

"They think nothing of the kind," he interrupted, "but let that pass! Why should they want to know exactly how many boys and how many girls a man has? and what their ages are, and all the rest of the bother?"

"They suspect us of shirking military duty. The books, as of course you know, are not correct, and we want to prove—"

"Well, that may be so, for one thing—I'll allow that—but—about licenses! Why do you note down who has them—and what they are worth?"

"In order to prove that the Jews—"

But the Maskil does not allow me to finish my sentence.

"A likely story! Meantime, people will know that this one and the other pays less than he ought to for his license, and he'll never hear the last of it."

Scarcely had he said so, when the heads in the window disappeared; the beadle in the door-way took himself off,

and the Maskil, who had really meant well all along, stood like one turned to stone.

The population had taken fright, and in another hour or two the town was full of me.

I was suspected of being commissioned by the excise. And why not, indeed? The excise knew very well that a Jew would have less difficulty in getting behind other people's secrets.

I was left to pace the market-square alone. The town held aloof. It is true that the Maskil dogged my footsteps, but he had become antipathetic to me, and I couldn't look at him.

The faces in the Gass became graver and darker, and I began to think of escaping. There are too many side-glances to please me—there is too much whispering.

It occurred to me to make a last effort. I remembered that the rabbi of Tishewitz had once been our Dayan, and would remember me, or at least witness to the fact that I was not what they took me for.

"Where does the rabbi live?" I inquire of the Maskil. He is pleased and says: "Come, I will show you!"

#### THE RABBI OF TISHEWITZ

No one who has not seen the rabbi of Tishewitz's dressing-gown would ever know the reason why the reb-bitzin, his third wife, though hardly middle-aged, already wears a large pair of spectacles on her nose. The dressing-gown looks as if it were simply *made* of patches.

"If only," complains the rabbi, "the town would give me another two gulden a week, I could get along. *Asö is gor bitter!* But I shall get my way. Their law-

suits they can decide without me; when it is a question of pots and pans, any school-teacher will do; questions regarding women, of course, cannot be put off; and yet I shall get my way, I'm only waiting for the election of the elders; they can't have an election without a rabbi. Imagine a town—no evil eye!—a metropolis in Israel, without elders! And if that won't do it, I shall refuse to try the slaughtering-knives—I've got them fast enough!”

It was no easy matter to divert the rabbi's thoughts from his own grievances, but on the Maskil's promising to do his utmost to induce the community to raise his salary, he begged us to be seated, and listened to our tale.

“Nonsense!” he said, “I know you! Tell the fools I know you.”

“They run away from me!”

“*Ett!*<sup>1</sup> They run away! Why should they run away? Who runs away? After what? Well, as you say they run away, I will go out with you myself.”

“In what will you go?” calls out a woman's voice from behind the stove.

“Give me my cloak,” answers the rabbi.

“Give you your cloak! I've this minute taken it apart.”

“Well,” says the rabbi, “the misfortune is happily not great. We will go to-morrow.”

I give him to understand that it is only noon, that I should be sorry to waste the day.

<sup>1</sup> An exclamation corresponding to the Italian *che!*

"Nu, what shall I do?" answers the rabbi, and folds his hands. "The rebbitzin has just started mending my cloak."

"Call them in here!"

"Call them? It's easy enough to call them, but who will come? Are they likely to listen to me? Perhaps I had better go in my dressing-gown?"

"It wouldn't do, rabbi!" exclaimed the Maskil, "the inspector is going about in the Gass."

"For my part," said the rabbi, "I would have gone, but if you say no—no!"

It is settled that we shall all three call the people together from the window. But opening the window is no such easy matter. It hasn't been opened for about fifteen years. The panes are cracked with the sun, the putty dried up, the window shakes at every step on the floor. The frame is worm-eaten, and only rust keeps it fastened to the wall. It is just a chance if there are hinges.

And yet we succeeded. We opened first one side and then the other without doing any damage.

The rabbi stood in the centre, I and the Maskil on either side of him, and we all three began to call out.

The market was full of people.

In a few minutes there was a crowd inside the room.

"Gentlemen," began the rabbi, "I know this person."

"There will be no writing people down!" called out several voices together.

The rabbi soon loses heart.

"No use, no use," he murmurs, but the Maskil has got on to the table and calls out:

"Donkeys! They *must* be written down! The good of the Jews at large demands it!"

"The good of the Jews at large," he says, and he goes on to tell them that he has gone through the whole chapter with me, that there is no question of a joke, that I have shown him letters from the Chief Rabbis.

"From which Chief Rabbis?" is the cry.

"From the Chief Rabbi in Paris," bellows the Maskil, "from the Chief Rabbi in Paris (no other will do for him), from the Chief Rabbi in London—"

"Jews, let us go home!" interrupted someone, "*nisht unsere Leut!*"<sup>1</sup>

And the crowd dispersed as quickly as it had come together. We three remained—and the beadle, who came close to me:

"Give me something," he said, "for the day's work."

I gave him a few ten-kopek pieces, he slipped them into his pocket without counting them, and was off without saying good-bye.

"What do *you* say, Rabbi?" I asked.

"I don't know what to say, how should I? I am only dreadfully afraid—lest it should do me harm—"

"*You?*"

"Whom else? *You?* If you don't get any statistics, it will be of no great consequence, for 'He that keepeth Israel will neither slumber nor sleep!' I mean the two extra gulden a week."

The rebbitzin with the large spectacles has come out from behind the stove.

<sup>1</sup> Not our people!

"I told you long ago," she says, "not to interfere in the affairs of the community, but when did you ever listen to me? What has a rabbi to do with *that* sort of thing? Kohol's business!"

"*Nu*, hush, Rebbitzin, hush!" he answers gently; "you know what I am, I have a soft heart, it touched me, but it's a pity about the two gulden a week."

## TALES THAT ARE TOLD

Sad and perplexed in spirit, I came down from the rabbi, with the Maskil, and into the street. There we came across the beadle, who assured us that, in his opinion, we should be able to go on with the work to-morrow.

The whole 'Tararam'<sup>1</sup> had been stirred up by two impoverished householders, who were now in great misery; one, a public-house keeper, and the other, a horse-dealer.

The Maskil, for his part, promises to talk the matter over with the townspeople between Minchah and Maariv, and if he doesn't turn the place upside down, then his name is not Shmeril (such a name has a Maskil in Tishewitz!). They may stand on their heads, he said, but the notes must be taken. "The very authorities that forbade will permit."

Well done! It is evident that the Maskil had studied in a Cheder, in the great world one meets with other Maskilim.

I go back to the inn; the beadle comes, too. At my host's they still have services, the mourning for his wife

<sup>1</sup> Commotion.

not being ended. Between Minchah and Maariv, we get on to politics; after Maariv, on to the Jews. The greater part are dreadfully optimistic. In the first place, it's not a question of *them*, secondly, plans will not prosper against "Yainkil,"<sup>1</sup> he has brains of his own; thirdly, it's like a see-saw, now it goes up and now it goes down;<sup>2</sup> fourthly, God will help; fifthly, "good Jews" will not allow it to happen.

The old song!

"Believe me," exclaims one, with small, restless eyes under a low forehead, "believe me, if there were unity among all 'good Jews,' if they would hold together, as one man, and stop repeating Tachanun,<sup>3</sup> Messiah would *have* to come!"

"But the Kozenitz Rebbe, may his memory be blessed, *did* stop," suggested another.

"One swallow," replied the young man, "does not make a summer." Who talks of their imposing a prohibition on All-Israel?"

There are times when one must set one's self against things—defend one's self.

"If they were to issue a prohibition," says someone, ironically, and with a side-glance at me, "the heretics would take to praying, if only for the sake of saying Tachanun, so that Messiah should *not* come."

The company smile.

"But where is the harm," asks someone else, "if the great people don't agree among themselves?"

<sup>1</sup> Nickname for a Jew, diminutive of Jacob.

<sup>2</sup> Anti-Semitism.

<sup>3</sup> Prayer of supplication.

The company gave a groan. Doubtless each remembered how many times he had suffered unjustly on account of the want of unity, and the surest proof of Tishewitz having greatly suffered by reason of dissensions is, that no clear explanation was given as to who was at fault that the great were not at one, so fearful were they of provoking a fresh disagreement.

I put forward that poverty had more to do with the differences than anything.

There is nothing to trade with, people go about empty-handed, seeking quarrels to while away the time with; the proof is that in larger towns, where each goes about his own business, there is quiet.

If someone, I opine, would throw into Tishewitz a few thousand rubles, everything would be forgotten.

"To be sure, we know wealth is everything!" exclaims somebody. "If I had only had so much brains, I could put all Tishewitz into my pocket to-day. It was just a toss-up—I had only to say the word."

"True! True!" was heard on all sides. "It is an actual fact."

The man who had only required to have so much brains, or a little determination, to become rich, looked like poverty itself: lean, yellow, shrunk, "wept out," and in a cloak that had its only equal in the dressing-gown of the Tishewitz rabbi.

Thereupon came the Maskil.

Of course, he laughed.

"Reb Elyeh, you must have bought the lucky number an hour before the drawing!"

"Listen to his cheek!" says Reb Elyeh. "As if he couldn't remember the story!"

"May my head not ache," swears the Maskil, "for so long as I have forgotten—if ever I heard the lies at all."

"Lies!" retorts Reb Elyeh, much hurt, "is that so? Lies? According to you, other things are lies as well."

I interfere and ask what the story may be.

"You've heard of the Tsaddik of Vorke of blessed memory?" begins Reb Elyeh.

Of course!

"Naturally, *Kind und Keit*<sup>1</sup> knew of him. And you will have heard that there came to him not only the pious men of the nations of the world, but even 'German' Jews, even Lithuanians, knowing fellows that they are. May I have as much money as I have seen Lithuanians at his house! There is even a story about a discussion a Lithuanian had with him. A Lithuanian must always be showing off his acumen! He asks a question about the Tossafot on *Vows*. The Rebbe, of blessed memory, explains a bit of the Mishnah to him upside down.

"Well, I never, Rebbe!" exclaims the Lithuanian, 'why, the Tossafot on *New Year* dealing with the same subject says exactly the opposite of your words.' Well, what do you say to that? It was a miracle the Rebbe did not seize and strangle him on the spot. But that is not what I was driving at. The 'Vorker' treated the Almighty like a good comrade.

"Lord of the world (and he sat down in the middle of the room)! Would it not have been enough to torment the Jews with persecutions? Now one cannot even sit and study in peace.'

<sup>1</sup> Kith and kin.

"Someone, it would appear, answered him from 'up there.'

" 'So,' he said, 'that is another thing altogether! I give in; good pay puts everything straight. But, Lord of the world! a little of it here as well!'

"Again one could see in his face that he heard a response, and he answered:

" 'Well, if not—not! You are solvent, we will wait!'

"But that is not what I was after. His chief concern was whatever was connected with circumcision. In the matter of circumcision he was steel and iron. In that he would take no denial from the Powers above. And, indeed, they waited for his word up there! Scarce had he given a sign, when the thing he wanted was done and established. He said, that before going to a circumcision, when he merely began to think of the Mohel-knife, the quality of *Fear*<sup>1</sup> straightway diffused itself through his being, and then there could be no doubt all would go as he wanted, for 'the will of those who *fear* Him He executeth.'

"He was very sorry that people had become aware of this peculiarity of his. He knew that on this account he would not perform the ceremony here much longer, that he would be called to join the Heavenly Academy. His relations to the upper world having become known, the very stability of the world was endangered. It ought to have remained a secret.

"Well, people had become aware of it. I, too. And even sooner than others, because the treasurer, Mösheh,

<sup>1</sup> A Kabbalistic allusion.

was my first wife's brother-in-law, and he it was who let out the secret. For this he was deprived of his place for half a year, but his distress was so great, the Rebbe had compassion on him, and restored him to his office. But that doesn't belong to the story either.

"Enough that I knew it.

"Well, 'and he kept the thing in his heart.' I waited, for I was not going to plague the Rebbe about a trifle. I waited. I was living just then a mile outside Vorke. My first wife was alive, and she did not fare badly, though it was difficult to make both ends meet. But I earned whatever it was by my match-making, and my wife supported us by means of her stall. And not only us, but also she provided for a married couple, my eldest daughter and her husband, who was an excellent scholar. What, then, was lacking?

"And it came to pass on a day that my son-in-law was away at the Ger Rebbe's, there was a fair in the town, and my daughter was in child-bed. It went hard with her, a first baby. Beile Bashe, the midwife, was at her wit's end, and this was the third day of her pains. No cupping, no blood-letting seemed to help—things were very bad. And I hear that the Rebbe is coming to a circumcision.

"What do you think? 'There sprang up light for the Jews!' We were all overjoyed. It put new life into us. We pray that God will preserve her another day and a half, because people were only let in an hour before the ceremony. But meanwhile things got worse and worse, she was near death.

"An hour or two before the ceremony, however, she

grew easier, or so it seemed to me. She came to herself, opened her eyes, urged her mother to go to the fair, and called me to her bedside. A foolish woman, they are all alike—they blame us for it.

“She doesn’t like Shmülek, she says, she never liked him, she didn’t want him from the very first. She can’t stand him and had better die. She had sent her mother out on purpose, because she was afraid of her. She, peace be upon her, was a terror to the children—she wanted to slap her daughter on her wedding-day.

“I, of course, gave her to understand that all women are the same, that some even make a vow never to live with their husbands again; that the sin-offering is there on that account—some even swear that—‘but no one may be held responsible for what he utters in pain and grief.’ But she keeps to it, she bids me farewell, she needs no vows, no oaths, she says, smiling. I am going out, she says, like a candle.

“Well, I listen to her and can see all the while that she is better. She is quite clear again in her mind, and it only wants half an hour to the circumcision. And she looked quite pretty again.

“I sit by the bed and talk to her—even the midwife had gone to buy a cradle at the fair. I look at the clock—it is time to go. I look at her. Upon my word! Quite well! And yet I do not want to go and leave her all alone, and nearly alone in the town.

“The fair, you see, comes once a year, and lasts three days, and it means Parnosseh for the whole twelve

months. So, you see, there was no one left at the Rebbe's even—every soul was off to the fair.

“Well, I wait a bit.

“But in half an hour things got suddenly worse. She snatches at my hand, falls back on the pillows, makes grimaces. Bad!

“She begins to moan. I call for help, no one answers. There is a great noise from the fair—nobody hears *me*. Among a thousand men and women—and we might have been in a wilderness. I want to pull away my hands, go and call somebody, but she holds them tight.

“Two, three minutes pass, it grows late, things are bad. I tear away my hands and I run thither. The circumcision was at the further end of the town. I fly along roads, over bales of merchandise, I fly and fly! It is all too long to me. It was July and yet I shivered with cold as I ran—there, there is Tsemach's house, where the ceremony has taken place.”

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“My heart beats as though I were a malefactor; I feel that *there*, at home, a soul is about to escape. There I am at the first window! I will not wait for the door, I will break a pane and get in that way. I run up to the window, I see the Rebbe is really in the room, he is walking up and down, I am about to enter like a housebreaker. I gather my remaining strength—there is a cry in my ears: Father, father! I leap.”

The narrator was out of breath. He takes a rest, lowers his eyes, which are full of large tears, and ends quietly with a broken voice:

"But it was not to be! There was a heap of manure and stones before the window—I fell, and nearly broke my neck. I have a mark on my forehead to this day. When they brought me in to the Rebbe, he motioned me away with his hand.

"When I got home (*how* I got there, I don't know), she was lying on the floor—either she fell out of bed dying, or I pulled her out tearing away my hands."

The listeners were silent, a stone weighed on our hearts.

The Maskil soon recovered himself.

"Well," he said, "blessed be the righteous Judge! Where are the riches?"

The narrator wiped his eyes with his sleeve, gave a sad smile and continued:

"Yes, I only wanted to show you what one means when one says, it was not to be. There came trouble after trouble—my wife died—the stall went to the bad because it was kept by a man—I was left alone with the children, and there wasn't a crust—I married again—I took an elderly woman on purpose, because I thought she would do for the stall, but I was taken in. There was a baby a year. Meanwhile our fairs fell off, and for a whole twelvemonth the stall wasn't worth a pinch of powder.

"I determined to make an end of it—to give up the match-making, grow rich, and sit and study. *Aï*—how does one grow rich? I wrote to the brother-in-law of my first wife, to the treasurer, and asked him for God's sake to tell me when next there was a circumcision.

"I got a message before the month was out, and hastened to Vorke. I stop nowhere, but go straight to the Rebbe."

"And—a larger manure heap?" laughs the Maskil. The narrator gives him a vicious look.

"The Vorke Tsaddik," he said, "went in for ritual cleanliness, his whole religion was ritual cleanliness."

"Only see," remarked the Maskil, "how he looks at me! Rascal! When you came here first, who helped you? A Vorke Chossid? or perhaps your cousin the Tsaddik? or was it I? *ha?* You would have died of hunger long ago if it hadn't been for me!"

And he turns to me:

"And what do you suppose he is now? He teaches my children, and if I were to take them away from him, he would have no Parnosseh left! . . . not a crust of bread . . ."

The other stands silent with downcast eyes.

The Maskil disgusts me more and more, although he made a sign to me with his eyes a little while ago, to the effect that he had exerted himself on my behalf, and with his hands, that to-morrow there will be taking of notes.

I turn to the other:

"Well, my friend?"

"See for yourself," says he to the Maskil, "our note-taker is more of a Maskil than you, on the face of him, and *he* doesn't make game of things . . . one might say, on the contrary. Rambam<sup>1</sup> (lehavdîl) did not believe in magic . . . but at any rate, he answers seriously . . . a Jew should have manners . . . to make fun of things is not fair . . . man, it cuts to the heart!"

"Well, well," says the Maskil, more gently, "let us have the rest!"

<sup>1</sup> Maimonides.

"I will make it short," says the poor Jew. "I come in without a ticket of admission, nothing to speak for me, without even a money-offering, but that would have been no help at such a time, only his face was terrible! My feet shook under me! I stood there without opening my mouth. He, may his merits protect us, took great strides up and down.

"Suddenly he saw me and gave a roar like a lion.

"'What do you want?'

"I was more terrified than ever and scarcely answered:

"'Riches!'

"It seemed as though the Rebbe had not quite understood.

"'Riches?' he asked, and his voice was like thunder.

"'If only . . . Parnosseh!' I answer in a lower tone.

"'What, Parnosseh!' he cried as before.

"'Only not to die of hunger!'

The Rebbe hurried up and down, stopped suddenly and asked:

"'What else?'

"I thought I should drop dead! It seemed to me (I don't know, but it seemed to me) as if someone else, and not I, had control of my tongue, and it replied:

"'I want Yòsef to be a learned man!'

"'What besides?' I hardly escaped alive, and he, may his merits protect us, died the following week.

"Well? What lay between me and the riches? A hair's breadth! it was my own fault. If I had stood up to him and kept to it! Well!"

"At least," I inquire, "is your son learned?"

"He *would* have been," he replies in a broken voice, "only he won't learn . . . even a Rebbe can't help that . . . he *won't* learn—what can one do?"

"And the moral," interposes the Maskil, "is that one shouldn't keep rubbish heaps under the window, that you can do nothing without money, and, above all, that one shouldn't be frightened of any Rebbe!"

In one second the livid-faced Jew had flushed scarlet, his eyes shot fire, his person lengthened, and the room resounded with two slaps received by the Maskil.

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I fear that his first request will equally go unfulfilled: he will yet die of hunger.

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#### A LITTLE BOY

The innkeeper's pretty little boy, with his shrugs and pouts, and his curls full of feathers, haunts me.

Now he stands before me with a small onion in his hand, and he cries—he wants two; or I hear him at evening prayer, repeating the Kaddish in his plaintive child-voice, so tearfully earnest that it goes to my very heart. When the Chossid slapped the Maskil, the child turned pale and green with fright, so that I took him by the hand and led him out of the room.

"Come for a walk."

"A walk?" he stammers.

The pale face flushes.

"Do you never go out for a walk?"

"Not now. When my mother, peace be upon her, was

alive, she used to take me out walking Sabbaths and holidays. My father, long life to him, says it's better to sit at one's book."

We were already in the long entrance passage. A "Shield of David" shone redly from a lamp some way off. I could not see his face, but the thin little hand trembled as it lay in mine.

We stepped out into the street.

The sky that hung over Tishewitz resembled a dark blue uniform with dim steel buttons.

My companion found it like a curtain<sup>1</sup> sewn with silver spangles.

Perhaps he is dreaming of just such a blue satin "prayer-bag," with spangles, some day to be his own. In five or six years he may receive it as a gift from his bride.

The little town looks quite different by night. The rubbish heaps and the tumbledown houses are hidden in the "poetical and silent lap of darkness."

The windows and door-panes look like great, fiery, purple eyes. By the hearth-sides pots of boiling water must be standing ready for the potatoes or the dumplings.

The statistics give an average annual expenditure of thirty-seven and a half rubles a head—about ten kopeks a day. Now calculate: school fees, two sets of pots and pans, Sabbaths and holidays, an illness, and a wonder-working Rebbe—besides extras. You see now why there is not always a meal cooking, why the dumplings are of buckwheat without an egg, and why the potatoes are not always eaten with dripping. Many of the houses are

<sup>1</sup> The curtain hung in front of the Ark.

stone-blind. In these it is a question of a bit of bread with or without a herring, and perhaps grace without meat. In one of those houses must live the widow who requires so little, beating her hollow chest through the long confession. Perhaps she measures her winding-sheet, or thinks of her wedding dress of long ago with its gold braid, and from her old eyes there drops a tear, and she whispers, smiling, into the night: "After all, what does a Jewess need?"

My motherless companion is thinking of something else. Hopping on one little foot, he lifts his face to the moon, swimming with a silly, aristocratic air in and out of the light clouds.

He sighs. Has he seen a star fall? No.

"Öi," he says, "*wollt ich gewollt, Meshiach soll kommen!*" (How I do wish the Messiah would come!)

"What is the matter?"

"I want the moon to be made bigger again. It is so dreadfully sad about her! She committed a sin, but to suffer so long! It will soon be six thousand years."

Altogether, two requests! one of his earthly father for a second little onion, and one of his Father in Heaven, for the enlargement of the moon.

A wild impulse seized me to say: "Let alone! Your father will soon marry again, you will soon have a step-mother, become a step-child, and have to cry for a bit of bread! Spare the little onion, forget about the moon..."

It was all I could do to refrain.

We left Tishewitz behind, the spring airs blew toward

us from the green fields. He drew me to a tree, we sat down.

He must have sat here, it occurs to me, with his mother. She must have pointed out to him the different things that grew in the narrow plots belonging to the townspeople. He recognizes wheat, rye, potatoes.

And those are briars.

Nobody eats briars, do they?

Donkeys eat briars.

"Why," he asks, "did God make all creatures to eat different things?"

He does not know that if they ate the same, they would be all alike.

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#### THE YARTSEFF RABBI

The Yartseff rabbi is a man who has all that heart desireth. He gets four rubles a week, and that is really more than enough. How? Are they not an old couple without children? He used to be Dayan in a larger town. There also he had four rubles a week, and nearly cut his fingers to bits over dried herring from week's end to week's end.

Here it's different. He goes through his daily fare for my benefit. For breakfast, what shall he say? a little milk-gruel; for dinner, sometimes, half a pound of meat; and in the evening, a glass of hot tea with stale rolls—he really cannot hold more! When one lives in the country, one must follow country customs, and they are much the best! . . . Dinner in the large towns is a ruination and a misery! . . . If there should happen not

to be any meat for dinner, well, he can afford to wait to eat till supper-time. Sometimes, early in the day, there is a little vegetable soup with dripping—that is how one lives in Yartseff and one does very well. In the large town it was often difficult to get on. Not that *he* cared! He really doesn't like meat. On week-days it is heavy food; on week-days he likes an onion with a little sour milk, he prefers sour milk even to Purim herbs, it is his nature, but the rebbitzin, she wouldn't look at it (he smiles as he glances at her)—her feelings used to get hurt. It was jealousy! *How* was that? Well, the Shochet's wife had sausage, and she, the Dayan'te, not so much as a bone—wasn't that humiliating, *ha?* Now he has done with all that; in Yartseff, thank God, they all eat meat every Sabbath and even mutton, and week-days all fare much alike, too. So long as the rebbitzin has no one to envy, it's all right!

"To envy!" throws in the rebbitzin. "I know, I know!" laughs the rabbi's head with the tiny wrinkles, the beard with the soft end quivers, the old eyes grow moister. "I know, it was not the sinful body you were thinking of, but the honor of the Law. Of course, a Shochet sausage and a Dayan—no, that was very wrong! A Dayan is distinctly greater than a Shochet! Well, well, anyhow, here I am quit of all that—where they don't kill for a whole week at a time."

He is still better pleased with the fresh country air. In the large towns, the householders must live in large houses. The rich householders live in the middle; below, in the cellars, and above, in the attics, poor people, including paid officials of the community like himself.

In summer he had felt suffocated there. It went so far that the rebbitzin stole away his snuff-box, so that he might at any rate not stuff snuff up his nose, but she had to give it him back—without snuff he was nowhere; he cannot even sit and read without it; even when not taking any, he must have the root snuff-box to finger while he studies, and even as now, when talking, he would lose the train of his thought and not find suitable words in which to express himself if he had not got it.

What do you think? When he first saw Yartseff with the wide, grass-grown market-place, he would have liked a band to play—and a band *played!* On that day all Kohol was at home, and they came to meet him with chamber-music! And he was charmed by the little, tiny houses, like pieces of root tobacco; there is one walled in, the big one in the centre of the market-place—it is the lord's.

And the stairs he got away from when he left the large town! He is naturally weak in the legs, in another year he would have been without feet! Then—the restfulness of it here! . . . quiet! . . . not a dog barks, and the children (lehavdil) don't shout. There are thirty boys and perhaps six teachers, so they're kept well in hand, not as in the large towns. At Purim and Chanukah, then they shout, yes! they make a fearful noise! But otherwise you don't hear a sound.

Above all, a blessing from His dear Name, there are no quarrels! Two or three Chassidîm with blue fringes,<sup>1</sup> but he prays for their life, because when they

<sup>1</sup>To their prayer-scarfs.

die, may it not be for a hundred years, there will be a to-do over their burial.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile there is peace. The inhabitants of the place are all peddlers or "messengers." Even the artisans do not remain at home, but go and work in the villages, even the Feldscher goes about the district with the "cuppers." Early on Sunday you can see the whole male population coming out of the little houses. Outside the town they take off their boots, hang them upon a stick across their shoulder and start off in all directions. Friday evening they return. Even the Shochet sometimes goes away for a whole week, so when should they find time to quarrel? Sabbath and holidays are the time for disputes, and every now and again they get up a discussion, start a hare . . . but it is not their line! The thing halts. People are sleepy and tired.

He just sits and studies. Occasionally (he smiles) there is a dispute—only it is for the honor of God—between him and the Shochet. You understand, it is seldom a ritual question arises. All the week the people use milk dishes, Sabbath—meat dishes. They don't stand at the fire-place together. Questions about the fitness of slaughtered animals happen along once a year! But on that very account, they make the most of it, turn over the whole Talmud, all the codes, and there you have a quarrel. The Shochet is very obstinate and pig-headed, and has a way of shifting his bundle of faults on to other people's shoulders; says, the rabbi is obstinate and pig-headed! Even here he had terrible bother with

<sup>1</sup> Opponents might deny them burial in a choice place.

two things: the yeast and the house, and all (he smiles again) through the rebbitzin. With the yeast it befell in this wise; he had agreed with Kohol for four rubles a week. The previous rabbi got four rubles with the yeast, but they cheated *him* out of the yeast—he got none!

On the first Great Sabbath he preached a long sermon on leaven at Passover. “The town was beside itself with delight. Everyone knows a good thing, when he hears it, even the most ignorant. I say it is because all the souls were present at Mount Sinai, and there everything was revealed, even what scholars in time to come will deduce from what was explicitly given, so that even when the soul has forgotten, she recognizes whence things are . . . and soon the town gave me the yeast.

“Just at the moment I felt a little exultation, for which His dear Name quickly punished me. I had trouble with the yeast! I had disputes to settle all week between the housewives and the rebbitzin; one found her Sabbath loaf too hard, another too heavy, a third said her yeast ran, and people suspected the rebbitzin watered it. What could I do? I hadn’t seen her do it, and she said no!

“Well, it was all such nonsense! I can’t pass a decision in a case between the rebbitzin and the housewives, and I arbitrate; if they come on Friday, I exchange their loaf for mine, and a whole week I give a little extra yeast for Kliskelech.<sup>1</sup> Altogether a dreadful worry! God be praised, a tailor brought some dried yeast, and there was an end of it.”

<sup>1</sup> See note p. 61.

Then as to the house: he observed the rebbitzin was saving money—let her save! Was it his affair? The children are doing well, but may-be she wishes to buy a present for a grandchild—so be it! He is not much in favor of that himself, but he is not going to fight a woman. Perhaps (he reflects) she means differently; he knows, many prepare for later. He doesn't. He says, Blessed be His Name, day by day! When they die, there will be a winding-sheet, but he does not concern himself about it.

The affair of the yeast was just going on. To cut a long matter short, one day someone told him a fine tale—the rebbitzin had bought some timber. He came home, and sure enough, it was true. She had even engaged some workmen, she was beginning to build a house. What is it? She won't live in lodgings any longer. He interfered no further—let her build! And she built, she took possession, he—he just carried over his Talmud.

“Now, I am a householder, too.”

But it was a long way for him to go to the house-of-study.

“Not of you be it said, my feet have grown weak in my old age. I have not many books of my own. They have a rule in the house-of-study not to lend out any book, not to the rabbi, not to any head of the community. When a question arose, I had nothing to lay my hand on. This gave me a deal of trouble.

“But God helped me. There was a fire and several houses were burned down, mine among them. God be praised! The other householders had no great loss; they were insured. I was not, and Kohol, as you see, set aside for me a little corner of the house-of-study.”

## LYASHTZOF

I arrived in Lyashtzof on a dark summer night, between eleven and twelve o'clock. Another market-place with various buildings and little, walled-in houses round about.

In the middle of the market-place, a collection of large, white stones. I drive nearer—the stones move and grow horns; they become a herd of milk-white goats.

The goats show more sense than the heads of the community of Tishewitz: they are not frightened. One or two out of the whole lot have lifted their heads, looked at us sleepily, and once more turned their attention to the scanty grass of the Gass, and to scratching one the other.

Happy goats! No one calumniates you, *you* needn't be afraid of statisticians. It is true, people kill you, but what then? Does not everyone die before his time? And as far as troubles go, you certainly have fewer.

I recall what I was told in Tishewitz: "In Lyashtzof you will get on better and faster. The people are sensible, quieter; no one will run after you."

Kohol and the goats seem to be equally admirable; one like the other. But my host, an old friend, is not encouraging. He says it will not be so easy as people think.

"What will you do?" he asks. "Go from house to house?"

"What else?"

"I wish they may be civil."

"Why shouldn't they be?"

"A Jew hates having his money-box opened and the contents counted."

"Why so? Won't the blessing enter in afterwards?"

"No, it isn't that—the misfortune is that the credit will go out."

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#### THE FIRST ATTEMPT

Early in the morning, before the arrival of the beadle, there come some Jews—they want to see the note-taker.

My fame has preceded me.

I make a beginning, and turn to one of them:

"Good morning, friend!"

"Good morning, *Sholom Alechem*."<sup>1</sup>

He gives me his hand, quite lazily.

"What is your name, friend?"

"Levi Yitzchok."

"And your German name?"<sup>2</sup>

"Why do you want to know?"

"Well, is it a secret?"

"Secret or no secret, you may as well tell me why you want to know. I'll be bound *that's* no secret!"

"Then you don't know it?"

"Not exactly."

"Make a shot at it—just for fun!"

"*Bärenpelz*," he answers, a little ashamed.

"A wife?"

"*Ett!*"

"What does *ett* mean?"

<sup>1</sup> Peace be upon you! Hebrew.

<sup>2</sup> Surname.

"He wants a divorce!" another answers for him.

"How many children?"

He has to think, and counts on his fingers: "By the first wife—mine: one, two, three; hers: one, two; by the second wife. . ." He is tired of counting: "Let us say six!"

"Let us say ' is no good. I must know exactly."

"You see, 'exactly' is not so easy. 'Exactly!' Why do you want to know? *Was is?* Are you an official? Do they pay you for it? Will somebody follow and check your statements? 'Exactly!'"

"Tell, blockhead, tell," the rest encourage him, "now you've begun, tell!"

They want to know what the next questions will be.

Once again he has counted on his fingers and, heaven be praised, there are three more.

"Nine children, health and strength to them!"

"How many sons, how many daughters?"

He counts again:

"Four sons and five daughters."

"How many sons and how many daughters married?"

"You want to know that, too? Look here, tell me why?"

"Tell him, then, tell him!" cry the rest, impatiently.

"Three daughters and two sons," answers someone for the questioned.

"*Taki?*" says the latter. "And *Yisrolik?*"

"But he isn't married yet."

"Horse! They call him up next Sabbath!<sup>1</sup> What does a week and a half matter?"

I make a note and ask further: "Have you served in the army?"

"I bought exemption from Kohol, for four hundred rubles!<sup>2</sup> Where should I find them now?" and he groans.

"And your sons?"

"The eldest has a swelling below his right eye, and has besides—not of you be it said!—a rupture. He has been in three hospitals. It cost more than a wedding. They only just sent him home from the regiment! The second drew a high number.<sup>3</sup> . . . The third is serving his time now."

"And the wife?"

"At home with me, of course. Need you ask?"

"She might have been at *her* father's."

"A pauper!"

"Have you a house?"

"Have I a house!"

"Worth how much?"

"If it were in Samoscz, it would be worth something. Here it's not worth a dreier, except that I have a place to lay my head down in."

"Would you sell it for one hundred rubles?"

<sup>1</sup> Special calling-up of a bridegroom to the Reading of the Law.

<sup>2</sup> Up to the time when universal conscription was introduced in Russia in 1874, every Jewish community, Kohol, had to furnish a given number of recruits, the Government asking no questions as to how these were obtained.

<sup>3</sup> Which exempts him from military service.

"Preserve us! One's own inheritance! Not for three hundred."

"Would you give it for five hundred?"

"*Mê!* I should hire a lodging and apply myself to some business!"

"And what is your business now?"

"What business?"

"What do you live on?"

"*That's* what you mean! One just lives."

"On what?"

"God's providence. When He gives something, one has it!"

"But He doesn't throw things down from heaven?"

"He does so! Can I tell how I live? Let us reckon: I need a lot of money, at least four rubles a week. The house yields, beside my own lodging, twelve rubles a year—nine go in taxes, five in repairs, leaves a hole in the pocket of two rubles a year! *That's* it."

He puts on airs:

"Heaven be praised, I have no money. Neither I, nor any one of the Jews standing here, nor any other Jews—except perhaps the 'German' ones<sup>1</sup> in the big towns. We have no money. I don't know any trade, my grandfather never sewed a shoe. Therefore I live as God wills, and have lived so for fifty years. And if there is a child to be married, we have a wedding, and dance in the mud."

"Once and for all, what are you?"

"A Jew."

"What do you do all day?"

<sup>1</sup> Who have adopted German = Western ways of life.

"I study, I pray—what else should a Jew do? And when I have eaten, I go to the market."

"What do you do in the market?"

"What do I do? Whatever turns up. Well, yesterday, for example, I heard, as I passed, that Yoneh Borik wanted to buy three rams for a gentleman. Before daylight I was at the house of a second gentleman, who had once said, he had too many rams. I made an agreement with Yoneh Borik, and, heaven be praised, we made a ruble and a half by it."

"Are you, then, what is called a commission-agent?"

"How should I know? Sometimes it even occurs to me to buy a bit of produce."

"Sometimes?"

"What do you mean by 'sometimes'? When I have a ruble, I buy."

"And when not?"

"I get one."

"How?"

"What do you mean by 'how'?"

And it is an hour before I find out that Levi Yitzchock Bärenpelz is a bit of a rabbinical assistant, and acts as arbiter in quarrels; a bit of a commission-agent, a fragment of a merchant, a morsel of a match-maker, and now and again, when the fancy takes him, a messenger.

Thanks to all these "trades," the counted and the forgotten ones, he earns his bread, although with toil and trouble, for wife and child—even for the married daughter, because her father-in-law is *but* a pauper.

## THE SECOND ATTEMPT

I am taken into a shop.

A few packets of matches, a few boxes of cigarettes; needles, pins, hair-pins, buttons, green and yellow soap, a few pieces of home-made, fragrant soap, a few grocery wares.

"Who lives here?" I ask.

"You can see for yourself!" answers a Jewish woman, and goes on combing the hair of a little girl about ten years old, who has twitched her head from under the comb and stares with great, astonished eyes, at the Goï<sup>1</sup> who talks Yiddish.

"Lay your head down again!" screams the mother.

"What is the name of your husband?" I inquire.

"Mösheh."

"And his 'German' name?"

"May his name come home!" she scolds suddenly.

"He has been four hours getting a dish from the neighbor's!"

"Stop scolding," says the beadle, "and answer when you're spoken to!"

She is afraid of the beadle. He is beadle and bailiff together, and collects the taxes, besides being held in great regard by the town-justice.

"Who was scolding? who? what? Can't I speak against my own husband?"

"What is his 'German' name?" I ask again.

The beadle remembers it himself, and answers, "Jungfreud."

"How many children have you?"

<sup>1</sup> Gentile.

"I beg of you, friend, come later on, when my husband is here; that's his affair! I've enough to do with the shop and six children. Go away, for goodness' sake!"

I make a note of six children, and ask how many are married.

"Married! I wish any of them were married, I should have fewer gray hairs."

"Are they all girls?"

"Three are boys."

"What are they doing?"

"What should they be doing? Plaguing my life out with their open mouths!"

"Why not teach them a trade?"

She turns up her nose, gives me a black look, and refuses to give any further answers.

I have an idea: I buy a packet of cigarettes. She looks less disagreeable, and I ask:

"How much does your husband earn?"

"*He?* He earn anything? What use do you suppose *he* is, when I can't even send him to fetch a dish from a neighbor's? He's been four hours already. It won't be thanks to *him* if we get any supper to-night!"

She goes off into another fury. I have to go outside and catch the husband in the street. I knew him—he was carrying a dish!

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#### AT THE SHOCHET'S

I am greeted by a mixture of different voices. A hero of a cock gives a proud crow, as though there were no such thing as a slaughter-knife in the world. Contrari-

wise, a calf lows sadly—it would seem to be hungry, while between the boards under the holes in the tall roof chirp quantities of small birds. They have wings and laugh at the Shochet. It is summer, the air is full of insects, men, even the poorest and stingiest, leave crumbs about. Zip! zip! and zip! and zip! zip! zip! The bed in the nest is made, the “he” is decked out in bright colors, the “she” is modest and silent, and the children have had enough to eat! They are warm, and are not “down” in someone’s note-book for military service or in connection with the matter of a license.

But ask them what is the meaning of a “blemish in the holy offerings!” This question is being discussed by two young men, barefoot, in skull-caps, and undressed to their “little prayer-scarfs.”<sup>1</sup>

The young men are only unfit for inspecting licenses or wares in the shop, but calves for the altar—as fast as you please!

When God portioned out the world, the peasant took the soil, the fisher the river, the hunter the forest, the gardener the fruit-trees, the merchant the weights and measures, and so on; but the poet lingered in a wood. The nightingale sang to him, the trees whispered all sorts of wood-gossip into his ear, and his eyes, the poetical eyes, could not look away from the girl kneeling by the stream, from the tadpole in her hand. And he came too late for everything! The world, when he arrived, was already divided up. God had nothing left for him but clouds, rainbows, roses, and song-birds. He

<sup>1</sup> Worn beneath the outer garments.

did not even find the young washerwoman on his way back, she had engaged herself somewhere as nurse.

You have fancy! Create a world for yourself, said God.

And people envied the poet—his world was the best! The peasant tilled his land with sweat and toil. The fisher is not idle—breaking ice in winter time is no joke. The hunter wearies hunting and pursuing. Pippins are not so easily made out of crab-apples! The merchant must bestir himself, if only about falsifying the weights and measures, else he dies of hunger. *One* is the poet, who lies on his stomach and creates worlds!

But it was a mistake. It turned out that his soul was only a camera-obscura that reflected the outside world with all its mud and pigs. So long as the pig keeps its place, it is not so bad, but when the pig gets into the foreground, the poet's world becomes as piggish as ours.

The only people who remain to be envied are our two young men, the Shochet's son with the Shochet's son-in-law. Our world with its pigs doesn't fit in with their world of "blemish in the sacrifice." There is no connection between the two, no bridge, no link whatever.

And as I have come into *their* world out of *our* world, the Gemorehs are shut, while the young faces express fear and wonder.

The Shochet is not at home, he has gone to a neighboring village; that is why the calf is still lowing in the house. The wife has a little draper's shop.

The daughter and a daughter-in-law stand by the fire and their faces are triply red.

First, from pride in their husbands with their Torah;

secondly, from the crackling fire, and thirdly, with confusion before a stranger, a man, and a "German" to boot. One caught a corner of her apron in her mouth, the other moved a few steps backward, as in the synagogue at the end of the Kedushah. Both look at me in astonishment from under low foreheads with hairbands of plaited thread.

The young men, however, soon recover themselves. They have heard of the note-taker, and have guessed that I am he!

The note-taking goes quickly. The Shochet gets four rubles a week, besides what he earns in the villages; were it not for the meat brought in from the villages round about, he would be doing very well.

The shop does not bring in much, but always something. Parnosseh, thank God, they have! As for the children, they will live with the parents, and when, in God's good time, the parents shall have departed this life, they will inherit, one, the father's profession, the other, the shop; the house will be in common.

They look better off than any in the town; better off than the traders, householders, workmen, better off even than the public-house keeper and the Feldscher together. There will come a time—I think as I go out—when even teaching will be one of the best paid professions.

It is all not so bad as people think: besides being a rabbi, a Shochet, a beadle, and a teacher, there is yet another good way of getting a living.

In the Shochet's house there is a female lodger; she pays fifteen rubles a year. The door is locked; through

the window, which looks into the street, I see quite a nice little room. Two well-furnished beds with white pillows, red-painted wooden furniture; copper utensils hang on the wall by the fire-place; there is a bright hanging-lamp. The room is full of comfort and household cheer.

She has silver, too, they tell me. I see a large chest with brass fittings. There must be silver candle-sticks in it, and perhaps ornaments.

What do you think? they say. She has a lot of money, the whole town is in her pocket. She is a widow with three children. The door is locked all through the week, because she only comes home every Sabbath, excepting Shabbes Chazon.<sup>1</sup> She spends the whole week going round the villages in the neighborhood, begging, with all three children.

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#### THE REBBITZIN OF SKUL

Esther the queen was sallow,<sup>2</sup> but a gleam of graciousness lighted up her countenance. Esther, the Skul rebbitzin, was also plain-featured, but it was not a gleam, rather a sun, of kindness that shone in her face. An old, thin woman, her head covered with a thin, wrinkled, pale pink skin, droops like a fine Esrog over her red kerchief. Only this Esrog has two kind, serious eyes.

<sup>1</sup> The "Sabbath of the Vision," preceding the Ninth of Ab (fast in memory of the destruction of the Temple), when the lesson from the prophets is Isaiah I, beginning, "The Vision of Isaiah." At this period there is much almsgiving.

<sup>2</sup> According to the Talmudic legend.

She is a native of the place, and lives by herself; she has married all her children in various parts of the country, but nothing would induce her to live with any one of them.

It is never advisable to let oneself be dependent on a son-in-law or daughter-in-law. The husband stands up for the wife—the wife for the husband (not without reason saith the holy Torah: “And therefore a man shall leave his parents, etc.”). She will not give them occasion to transgress the command to honor a mother, that is a real case of “thou shalt not cause the blind to stumble.”

“God, blessed be His Name, created man so that he should not see the faults of those nearest him, otherwise the world would be as full of divorces as of marriage contracts!”

Secondly—as the rabbi of Skul observed more than once—a widow who depends on her children is a double grass-widow, and “the words of the rabbi of Skul should be framed in gold and worn about the neck as an *Öibele*.” True, she says with a low sigh, *Öibeles* are not worn nowadays, imitation pearls are considered prettier!

She could not stay on in Skul. Since her husband the rabbi died, the place has become hateful to her. “Really,” she says, “its glory has departed, its splendor, and its beauty.” She goes there once a year, for the anniversary of his death, but she cannot remain long—“it has grown empty.”

She lived with the Skul rabbi forty years. Those that knew him say that she grew to be his second self.

He, may he forgive me! was a Misnagid; so she thinks nothing of "good Jews!" His "service" was the Torah in its plain meaning. She sits all day over the Pentateuch in Yiddish, or learns the Shulchan Aruch;<sup>1</sup> she quotes the Skul rabbi at every second word and it is his voice, his motions, his customs!

After the Skul rabbi's Kiddush and Havdoleh, she will listen to no other; she says her own over cake or currant wine. And *her* Kiddush is *his* Kiddush—the same low, dignified chant, the same sweetness. She eats "just kosher" and is very learned.

She can answer ritual questions! Forty years running she has stood by the hearth with her kind face turned to the table at which her husband sat and studied; her dove's eyes took in his every movement, her ears, half hidden under the head-kerchief, his every word, she was his true helpmeet, she hid his every thought in her brain and his goodness in her heart.

A river may have lain a hundred years in another bed, and all its previous twists and bends are wrought into the rocks of its first one. The Skul rabbi's life may have run more peacefully than a river, but the rebbitzin was no rock to him, rather a sponge that absorbed the whole of him.

She is not satisfied with the world as it is to-day. "If it is no longer pious, the Almighty must have a care; if His people behave so, it is doubtless because He wishes it. Only, there is no 'purpose' in it all; the present-day stuffs are spider-webs, and people don't sew as they used to, they cut it all up into seams!

<sup>1</sup> The standard code of laws.

"Don't talk to me of the curtains before the Ark, you can't make so much as a frock for a child out of them! The old-fashioned head-dresses get dearer every day, a head-kerchief ought to last forever, and even out of a bosom-kerchief you can always draw a gold or silver thread, but imitation pearls and glass spangles are good for nothing. And, believe me, it is all much uglier, in my opinion!"

But she bears no one a grudge: "My husband, the Skul rabbi, was a Misnagid, but he never persecuted a Chossid, heaven forbid!"

She remembers how the householders once came crying out that the Chassidim of the place were late in reciting the Shema,<sup>1</sup> and she heard from his own lips the reply: "There are," he said to them, "different armies, and they have different weapons, different customs, but they all serve the same kingdom. Even boots," he added with his smile, "are not all made by the same pattern."

She remembers all his sayings and lives according to his ideas.

He used to get very angry if a workman rose and stood before him as a sign of respect, for he was greatly in favor of people working with their hands, therefore when she came here with her few hundred rubles, she set up soap-making—sooner than live on others.

She knows that even a woman is under the law bidding every one do something for his own support—it is not

<sup>1</sup> "Hear, O Israel, etc." The Chassidim are not punctilious about observing the prescribed time limits for the recitation of the Shema.

one of the laws bound to a certain time, from which women are exempt. When they "kept" her money, she remained dependent on the soap only. "It wouldn't be a bad business," she says, "blessed be His Name! I make three to four rubles a week before a holiday. My soap, may His Name be praised! has a reputation in the whole neighborhood, only—just now it's all on credit. Some day the business will fail."

I look round on all sides, I see no utensils, no instruments for the work.

Nothing extra is wanted for it, she gives me to understand: "You take some ashes from the hearth, potatoes, and other vegetables, work them together in water, let them steam and then simmer over the fire; in that way you get 'unclear' soap, and if you do the same thing over again, you get *liter*, that is, good soap!" When I leave, she asks a little troubled and ashamed:

"Tell me, I beg of you, when your writings come into the hands of the great people, will they not say I must take out a license?"

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#### INSURED

A quiet summer night. Over there the celebrated wood shows black on the sky-line; our forefathers engraved in its trees the names of the divisions of the Talmud they completed as they went along. Yonder, not far off, they halted, and the "head of the dispersion" said "Pöh lîn!" (here abide!), and the land has ever since been called "Pöhlîn;"<sup>1</sup> but the other nations cannot make out the reason.

<sup>1</sup> Pölen = Poland.

And the wood has a short cut to Jerusalem. There was once a goat belonging to one of the native Lamed-Wòfniks, and the goat knew the road; she used to trot every morning to pasture on the Temple Mount, and return with three pitcherfuls of milk for the holy man.

To the right of the wood, beside a river, lies the town. It is divided into two parts. One part is a long strip—a straight, paved street with walled-in houses under sheet-metal roofs, quite substantial, fastened to the earth with foundations. The inhabitants of the street know for certain that they will live and die in them; that all the winds of heaven may blow without causing them to move an inch.

Then comes the second part, another world, quite spiritual: flimsy “hen-houses” entirely built of straw and fir planks, with only an occasional slate-roof. A breeze blows over them, and they are gone. Do their dwellers hope to find the short cut to the Temple Mount, like the immortal goat, or do they speculate on the fire-insurance?

And how like are the houses to their inhabitants! These are narrow-chested, with darkened eyes, and crouch under crooked straw caps.

Cocks crow out of the huts, ducks quack, and geese cackle. From out the marsh, which licks the threshold with seventy tongues, croak well-fed, portly frogs. A Jewish calf frequently contributes a bleat, and is answered out of the long street by a Gentile dog. I shall begin to take notes early in the morning.

I know beforehand what it will be: if not thirty-six rubles a year, it will be thirty-three or thirty-two. . . . I

shall find "many trades and few blessings,"<sup>1</sup> more soap factories, any number of empty houses. . . The beadle will reckon up for me: *he* is a messenger, *she*, a huckstress; two daughters are out in service in Lublin, in Samoscz . . . . one son is a "helper" in a Cheder, the other serving his time in the army, and the daughter-in-law with three, four, five children has gone home to her father and mother. . .

I shall find neglected children tumbling about in the swamp with the ducks and geese; mites of babies screaming their throats out in the cradles; sick people left alone in bed; boarded-out children sitting over Gemorehs; young women in furry wigs and with or without shyness; I hardly shut my eyes, before these same weary, livid, pale, twisted faces, walking sorrows, rise before me . . . there is seldom one who smiles, one with a dimple . . all the men so unmanly, so mummy-like, women with running eyes, carrying a load of fruit, a sack of onions, or else an unborn child together with the onions. I know I shall come across an unlicensed third-rate public-house, two or three horse-stealers, and more than two or three receivers of stolen goods. But what about the statistics? Can they answer the question, how many empty stomachs, useless teeth? how many people whose eyes are drawn out of their sockets as with pincers at the sight of a piece of dry bread? how many people who have really died of hunger?

All you gain by statistics is that you find out about an unlicensed public-house, or a horse-thief, or a receiver of stolen goods.

<sup>1</sup> "A sach melòches un wenig bròches."

Scientific medicine has invented a machine for checking heart-beats, one by one; the foolish statistics play with figures. Do statistics record the anxious heart-beats that thumped in the breast of the grandson of the descendant from Spanish ancestors, or the son of the author of the *Tevuas Shor*, before they committed their first illegality? Do they measure how their hearts bled *after* they committed it? Do they count the sleepless nights before and after?

Can they show how many were the days of hunger? How many times the children flung themselves about in convulsions, how often hands and feet shook when the first glass was filled by the unlicensed brandy-seller? Livid, ghastly, blue faces float before me in the empty air, and blue-brown, parched lips whisper: "There has been no fire in my chimney for twenty-four days."

"We have eaten potato peelings for ten."

"Three died without a doctor or a prescription; I *had* to save the fourth!"

The hoarse voices cut me to the heart, like a blunt knife; I leave the window where I have been standing; but the room is full of ghosts.

By the stove stands a red Jew, well-nourished: "Hee, hee!" he laughs. "Steal? buy stolen things? a business like any other . . . not less than a month's imprisonment . . . in a month I would have lost a fortune . . . all the noblemen will bear me witness . . . honestly! honestly!"

That voice is worse; it saws . . . I throw myself on the bed, I shut my eyes, and there appears to me the good old rebbitzin of Skul.

"Well," she says with her childlike, silvery voice, "and suppose the result of your inquiries were not favorable for the Jews, shall you be able to say: 'Thy people are all righteous?'" I feel as if her kind, blue, dove-like eyes rested soothingly on my hot forehead.

I fell asleep beneath them, and I dreamt of the two angels, the good inclination and the evil one. I saw them flying earthward before day-break, enveloped in a thin, pink mist. The evil inclination carried, in one hand, a blue paper with a large, black eye in the top left-hand corner, evidently a deed relating to a house or some property . . . expensive dresses, besides fur caps, braided kaftans, silk sashes, also a top-hat and frock-coat as if for one person; also handkerchiefs, head-kerchiefs, kerchiefs with tinsel, pearl necklaces, as well as silk and satin trains of all colors—all that in one hand, and in the other—potato peelings. . . .

The good inclination—naked, without clothes or things to carry, as God made him. . . . .

Both fly . . it seems as if the good inclination wanted to tell me something, he opens his pretty mouth . . . but not his voice, a cry of alarm wakes me. Fire! I spring out of bed, there is a fire just opposite!

A long tongue of flame stretches out toward me and seems to say:

"Don't be frightened: it's insured!"

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#### THE FIRE

The fiery tongue was put out at me by Reb Chaïm Weizensang's house. The tongue grew larger and the

house smaller till it fell in, into a sea of wails and screams of terror. There was fortunately no wind at the time of the conflagration.

When the sun rose from out the mist, blushing red like a beautiful and innocent maiden after the bath, she saw nothing but long, black, male heads turning over the ruins with sticks. They were looking for the remnants of Weizensang's riches in the remnants of his house.

Groups of yellow-faced women are already standing around it. The brown shawls are held with washed fingers over their unwashed heads, and pale lips lament and bewail the house.

With the morning came a fresh wind. A little sooner, and it would have played havoc. Now it just shakes the remaining old chimney over the women's heads as though it were a palm. The chimney rocks and groans sadly, as though it felt deserted, and perhaps it listens to the inn-keeper telling me the tale of the destruction of the house, and affirms with a nod: "True, true!"

You would sooner pick up every thread, every dust-grain of life out of which the sleep-angel has woven you a fantastic dream, than discover all the devices a Jew must resort to before he hears the clink of copper coin.

If I were to describe everything, you would think I had been dreaming myself. . . . Who shall read the Divine countenance when a wretched creature stands before Him, lifts its head with its racked brain, extinguished eyes, and trembling voice, and pressing its empty stomach with cracked and bony hands, prays without a voice, without a language; the tongue will not move, but the blood cries: "Lord of the world, I have

done my part, now—Thou must help! Lord of the world, feed me like the ravens! In what am I more worthless than they are? Lord of the world, where are *my* crumbs? When will it be *my* ‘Sabbath of Song?’”<sup>1</sup>

And for all the body he has, he might very well be a bird; nothing is wanting but the wings, and the nest with the crumbs.

And therefore the Jewish Parnossehs are so specialized that their like will only be in the twenty-first century, when one specialist will lift the upper eye-lid, a second press down the lower, and a third examine the sick eye.

If a dish of roast veal, a rag in a paper-factory, or an exported egg had a mouth to speak with and the rabbi Reb Heshil’s memory, they would still be unable to say how many Jewish hands had taken them out and put them in, from the peasant’s shed into the roasting-pan, from the manure-box into the “Holländer,”<sup>2</sup> from servitude into freedom. . . . And a Jewish Parnosseh is just such a ladder as Jacob our father saw in a dream, the night when all stones united into one stone for his head, a ladder standing on the earth, and the top of it reaches into the sky.

How deep it is chained into the earth, is known only to the worm at its foot, and how high it reaches—to the star only that shines above it.

<sup>1</sup> So called from Moses xv. 1, read on the day when—it is not far from the “New Year for trees”—children place food for birds in the windows.

<sup>2</sup> Machine for making paper out of rags.

We grow giddy gazing up the height; and when we peer down into the depths, our stomach turns, and we look green forever after.


Angels ascend and descend the ladder; men, alas, *climb* it with their last remaining strength, and fall down it when their strength is exhausted. And even if he can thank his stars his neck is not broken, the Jew has no strength left to begin climbing again.

Such is the ladder that was partly climbed by our "burnt-out" one. First he travelled between the villages as a "runner," on business for other people; the earth was hot to his bare feet. It was not the cry of a brother's blood this Cain heard, it was the cry of wife and children for bread.

Heaven came to his assistance; he bought very cheaply for two or three years on end, and then he was promoted from a "runner" to a "walker." There was already provision at home for a week at a time, and he only came back Fridays with the result of a week's bargaining; the brain was more composed, and had time to take in the fact that the feet were becoming swollen, that the father of six children ought always to walk and not run, if he wishes his feet to carry him till at least one of them is confirmed. And God helped further; he is now, blessed be the Name, a village peddler, that is, he walks only when there is no "opportunity"<sup>1</sup> to ride in from one village to another for a kopek; if the "opportunity" is there, he rides.

God helped him on again; another year or two, and he has his own horse and cart!

<sup>1</sup> See note p. 32.

Time does not stand still, and he took no rest, and God helped. The one horse turned into two, the cart into a trap, and it even came to a driver! And he is now a produce dealer; first he deals with peasants and then with gentlemen. 

And, God helping, he gets into favor first with the head of the dairy farm, then with the manager, after that with the bailiff, after that again with the steward, and at last with the count himself. O, by that time he is an inhabitant, settled in the place, the driver becomes a domestic servant, horse and carriage are sold, and pockets are lined with the count's receipts. . . .

What is he now?

He is like the sun round which circle the stars—smaller traders, and little stars—brokers.

He shines and illumines the whole place with credit. Yelenskin compared him to a spider sitting in his web, and the count to one of the flies entangled in it. After a while our "sun-spider," or "spider-sun," enlarged his house, wrote marriage contracts for his children, settled dowries on them; bought his wife pearls and himself a sealskin coat, engaged better teachers for his boys, and for the girls someone to teach them if only how to write a Jewish letter.

Suddenly (at least, for the town), the count was declared bankrupt, and our "spider-sun," or "sun-spider," lost everything at once.

If I had passed through a month earlier, I should have put down:

A house, fifteen hundred rubles, a propination,<sup>1</sup> a

<sup>1</sup> Right of a land-owner to keep a distillery—which was frequently let out to a Jew.

business in timber and produce, a money-lender. He has lent the count fifteen thousand rubles at ten per cent., not as a mortgage, but for "hand-receipts."

Now I write one word:

"Burnt-out."

I might add:

A man of eighty-two, swollen feet, a household of seventeen persons.

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#### THE EMIGRANT

I open a door.

A room without beds, without furniture, carpeted with hay and straw. In the middle of the room stands a barrel upside down. Round the barrel, four starved-looking children, with frowzy hair, hang over a great earthenware dish of sour milk, out of which they eat, holding a greenish metal spoon in their right hand and a bit of bran-bread in their left.

In one corner, on the floor, sits a pale woman, and the tears fall from her eyes on the potatoes she is about to peel. In the second corner lies "he," also on the floor, and undressed.

"It was no good your coming, neighbor," he says to me, without rising, "no good at all! I don't belong here now!"

But when he sees that I have no intention of going away, he raises himself slowly.

"Nu, where am I to seat you?" he asks sadly.

I assure him that I can write standing.

"You will get nothing out of me! I am only wait-

ing for a boat ticket—you see, I have sold everything, even my tools . . .”

“You are a mechanic?” I ask.

“A tailor.”

“And what obliges you to emigrate?”

“Hunger.”

And there was hunger in *his* face, in *her* face, and still more in the gleaming eyes of the children round the barrel.

“No work to be had?”

He shrugged his shoulders as much as to say, he and work had long been strangers.

“Where are you going to?”

“To London. I was there once already, and made money. I sent my wife ten rubles a week, and lived like a human being. The bad luck brought me home again.”

I wondered if the “bad luck” were his wife.

“Why not have sent for your family to join you?”

“It drew me back! It’s black as night over there. As soon as ever I closed an eye, I dreamt of the little town, the river round it, . . . I felt suffocated there, and it drew me and drew me . . .”

“This is certainly,” I remark, “a beautiful bit of country.”

“The air costs nothing, and we have been living on air, heaven be praised, these three years. This time I am going with wife and child. I mean to put an end to it.”

“You will miss the wood again!”

“The wood!”—he gives himself a twist with a bitter

smile—"my wife went into the wood the evening before last, to gather berries, and they marched her out and treated her to the whip."

"There is the river,"—I want to take him away from his sad thoughts.

His pale face grew paler.

"The river? In the summer it took one of my children."

I hurried away from the luckless home.

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#### THE MADMAN

I returned to my lodgings quite unnerved, and lay a long time on the hard sofa without closing an eye. . . . A noise wakes me. Something is stealing in to me through the window. I see on the window ledge two long, bony, dirty hands, and there raises itself from behind them an unkempt head with two gleaming eyes in a livid face.

"Won't you enter *me*?" asks the head, softly.

I do not know how to answer. He, meanwhile, has taken silence for consent, and stands in the middle of the room.

Alarmed, and still more astonished, I keep my eye on him.

"Write!" he says impatiently. "Shall I give you the ink and a pen?"

Without waiting for an answer, he pushes up to my sofa the little table with the writing materials.

"Write, please, write!"

And his voice is so soft and gentle, it finds its way into my heart, and I am no longer frightened.

I sit up to write. I question him, and he answers me.

"Your name?"

"Jonah."

"Your surname?"

"When I was a little boy, they called me Jonah Zieg. After my wedding, Jonah Drong, but since the misfortune happened to me, Mad Jonah."

"What is your German name?"

"O, you mean *that*?..Directly, directly. Perelmann. You see my pearls?"

He points to a torn, red kerchief round his neck, and says: "Real pearls, *ha?* But that's what I'm called. How can I help it?"

"A wife?"

"You had better *not* put her down: she doesn't live with me. Since the misfortune, she doesn't live with me... a nice wife, too. I would gladly have given her a divorce, but the rabbi wouldn't allow it. He said I mustn't. A nice little wife!"

And his eyes grew moist.

"She even took the child with her. It's better off with her—what should *I* do with it? Carry it about? They throw stones at me, and would have hurt it."

"One child is it you have?"

"One."

"What was your misfortune?"

"May you know trouble as little as I know that! Folk say a devil. The Rōfeh says, a stone fell into my head, and the soul, or, as he calls it, the life, into my belly. I don't remember the stone, but I have a bruise on my head."

He takes off his hat and cap together, bends his head, and shows me a bare bump in the hair.

"It may have been from a stone, but I *am* mad—that's certain."

"What is your eccentricity?"

"Two or three times a day I have my soul in my belly, and then I speak out of my belly, and crow like a cock. I can't stop myself, I really can't!"

"What were you *before* the misfortune?"

"I hadn't got to be anything. It happened to me early in the Kōst.<sup>1</sup> That is why I have only one child, health and strength to it!"

"Have you any money?"

"I had a few gulden dowry. A lot of it went in remedies—on 'good Jews' . . . the rest I gave *her*."

"What do you live on?"

"On trouble. The boys throw stones at me. I daren't go about in the market-place, else I might have earned something near a stall. At one time people were sorry for me and gave me things. Now times are bad—I have to go begging. I beg before dinner, while the children are still in Cheder. And it's little enough I get by it! The town is small; there are two mad people in it beside me. And now they say that yesterday the 'Lokshiche'<sup>2</sup> threw a saucepan at her servant's head. The servant is sure to go mad, quite sure! Only I don't know yet if she will crow as I do, or trumpet into her fist, like the rabbi's Shlom'tzie, or be silent like Hannah the Tikerin."

<sup>1</sup> Boarding with the wife's parents.

<sup>2</sup> Macaroni-seller.

## MISERY

I shall not call the little town by its name, but if I come across another such, I, too, shall begin to crow, like the madman. . . .

He was an excellent shoemaker, who supported wife and children (rarely less than four or five) respectably. He won a large sum of money in a lottery, took to drink, drank it all up, left his wife and children to shift for themselves, disappeared, and must have died since somewhere or other beneath a hedge.

But that is not specifically Jewish. Take another one of us, his partner in the lottery ticket. He was a teacher, won some money, hired a mill together with the Rebbe. The mill failed, now he is beadle in a Chassidic meeting-house, gets nothing for it, but he sells the "bitter drop." The wife is a "buyer-in," takes round eggs and butter to the houses. She doesn't earn much, because she is lame. One son is away, the second works somewhere at a carpenter's; one is at home, scrofulous.

The widow Beile Bashe, surname unknown, lives with a daughter-in-law, a soldier's wife. The husband disappeared in the Turkish war. The daughter-in-law plucks feathers—she is a Tikerin, and watches beside women in child-bed, or else by the sick. In summer, so long as the nobleman allowed it, she gathered berries in the forest; a sickly woman, she does a little bit of begging besides.

Zeinwill Graf has only lately become a skinner. Last year he was a great fisher, rented a river which the nobleman wished to let to a Christian; he paid a lot of ces-

sion-money, caught only "forbidden fish" the whole summer, and is now in dire poverty.

Shmerke Bentzies, formerly a Dantzig trader . . it is twenty years since he came home empty-handed. Since then he trades in currant-wine for Kiddush. The wife is a sempstress, has suffered a year or two with her eyes. "They haven't *no* children," but competition in the currant-wine trade is very keen, and they struggle.

Melach Berils, a fine young man, only lately boarding with his father-in-law . . he was in business together with a cattle-dealer and lost his money; meantime the father-in-law died in poverty. It is uncertain what he will do. There are three little children, not more.

I was also asked to put down a man (they had forgotten the name), a man with a wife, and children (nobody remembers how many, but a lot), who may arrive at any moment. The nobleman has refused to renew his lease; no one can tell what he will take to, but—"you may as well put him down!"

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#### THE LAMED-WÒFNIK

"We (the story is told me by a teacher of small children) once had a real Lamed-Wòfnik!"

"He said so himself?" I ask.

"Well, he would have been a fine Lamed-Wòfnik if he had! He denied it 'stone and bone.' If he were questioned about it, he lost his temper and fired up. But, of course, people got wind of it, they knew well enough! yes, 'kith and kin,' the whole town knew it! As if

there could be any doubt! People talked, it was clear as daylight! In the beginning, there were some who wouldn't believe—they came to a bad end!

“For instance: Yainkef-Yosef Weinshenker, a man of eighty and much respected, I can't quite explain, but he sort of turned up his nose at him. Did he *say* anything? Heaven forbid! but there! Like that. . . Turned up his nose as much as to say: Preserve us! Nothing worse! Well, what do you think? Not more than five or six years after, he was dead. Yainkef-Yosef lay in his grave. Poor Leah, the milkwoman! One was sorry for her. It was muddy, and she did not step off the stone causeway to make room for him. Would you believe it, the milk went wrong at all her customers' for a month on end! And there was no begging off! When approached on the subject, he pretended to know nothing about it, and scolded into the bargain!”

“Of course,”—I wish to show off my knowledge—“though a scholar decline the honor due to him. . .”

“A scholar? Is a Lamed-Wòfnik a scholar? And you think he knew even how to read Hebrew properly? He could manage to make seven mistakes in spelling Noah. Besides, Hebrew is nothing. Hebrew doesn't count for much with us. He could not even read through the weekly portion. And his reciting the Psalms made nevertheless an impression in the highest! The last Rebbe, of blessed memory, said that Welvil (that was his name, the Lamed-Wòfnik's) cleft the seventh heaven! And you think his Psalm-singing was all! Wait till I tell you!

“Hannah the Tikerin's goat (not of you be it said!)

fell sick, and she drove it to the Gentile exorcist, who lives behind the village. The goat staggered, she was so ill.

“On the way—it was heaven’s doing—the goat met the Lamed-Wòfnik, and as she staggered along, she touched his cloak. What do you think? Cured, as I live! Hannah kept it to herself, only what happened afterwards was this: A disease broke out among the goats; literally, ‘there was not a house in which there was not one dead;’ then she told. The Lamed-Wòfnik was enticed into the market-place, and all the goats were driven at him.”

“And they all got well?”

“What a question! They even gave a double quantity of milk.”

“The Tikerin got a groschen a goat—she became quite rich!”

“And he?”

“He? nothing! Why, he denied everything, and even got angry and scolded—and such an one *may* not take money, he is no ‘good Jew’—he must not be ‘discovered!’”

“How did he live?”

“At one time he was a shoemaker (a Lamed-Wòfnik has got to be a workman, if only a water-carrier, only he must support himself with his hands); he used to go to circumcisions in a pair of his own shoes, but in his old age he was no longer any good for a shoemaker, he could no longer so much as draw the thread, let alone put in a patch—his hands shook: he just took a message, carried a canful of water, sat up with the dead at night,

recited Psalms, was called up to the Tochechoh,<sup>1</sup> and in winter there was the stove to heat in the house-of-study."

"He carried wood?"

"Carry wood? Why, where were the boys? The wood was brought, laid in the stove, he gave the word, and applied the light. People say: A stove is a lifeless thing. And yet, do you know, the house-of-study stove knew him as a woman (lehavdil) knows her husband! He applied a light and the stove burnt! The wind might be as high as you please. Everywhere else it smoked, but in the house-of-study it crackled! And the stove, a split one, such an old thing as never was! And let anyone else have a try—by no means! Either it wouldn't burn, or else it smoked through every crack, and the heat went up the chimney, and at night one nearly froze to death! When he died, they had to put in another stove, because nobody could do anything with the old one.

"He was a terrible loss! So long as he lived there was Parnosseh, now, heaven help us, one may whistle for a dreier! There was no need to call in a doctor."

"And all through his Psalms?"

"You ask such a question? Why, it was as clear as day that he delivered from death."

"And no one died in his day?"

"All alive? Nobody died? Do you suppose the death-angel has no voice in the matter? How many times, do you suppose, has the 'good Jew' himself of blessed memory wished a complete recovery, and he, Satan, opposed him with all his might? Well, was it any good? An angel is no trifle! And the Heavenly

<sup>1</sup> The rebukes and threats in Lev. xxvi and Deut. xxviii.

Academy once in a while decides in the death-angel's favor. Well, then! There was no doctor wanted; not one could get on here. Now we have *two* doctors!"

"Beside the exorcist?"

"He was taken, too!"

"*Gepegert?*"<sup>1</sup>

"One doesn't say *gepegert* of anyone like that—the 'other side'<sup>2</sup> is no trifle, either."

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#### THE INFORMER

If Tomàshef had a Lamed-Wòfnik, it had an "informer" too! This also was told me by the primary school teacher. Neither is it long since he—only I don't know how it should be expressed—departed, died, was taken.

Perhaps you think an ordinary informer, in the usual sense of the word; he saw a false weight, an unequal balance, and went and told? Heaven forbid! Not at all! It was all blackmail, all frightening people into paying him not to tell—see, there he goes, he runs, he drives, he writes, he sends! And he sucked the marrow from the bones—

"And he was badly used himself," continued the teacher. "I remember when Yeruchem first brought him here! A very fine young man! Only Yeruchem promised 'dowry and board,' and hadn't enough for a meal for himself. And Yeruchem had been badly used,

<sup>1</sup> Used when speaking of animals.

<sup>2</sup> "Beyond the Good"—the powers of darkness. We touch here on Kabbalistic lore relating to the origin of evil.

too. His brother Getzil (a rich miser as ever was), he had the most to answer for!

"It is a tale of two brothers, one clever and good, the other foolish and bad; the good, clever one, poor, and the bad fool, a rich man. Of course, the rich brother would do nothing for the poor one.

"Well, so long as it was only a question of food, Yeruchem said nothing. But when his daughter Grüne had come to be an overgrown girl of nineteen or twenty, Yeruchem made a commotion. The town and the rabbi took the matter up, and Getzil handed over a written promise that he would give so and so much to be paid out a year after her marriage. Not any sooner; the couple might change their minds, Yeruchem would spend the money, and there would be the whole thing over again.

"He, Getzil, wished to defer the payment until the end of three years, but they succeeded in getting him to promise to pay it in one year. When the time came, Getzil said: 'Not a penny! Anyhow, according to *their* law, the paper isn't worth a farthing,' and meanwhile it became impossible to settle it within the community. The old rabbi had died; the new rabbi wouldn't interfere, he was afraid of the crown-rabbi, lest he send it up to the regular courts—and there it ended! Getzil wouldn't give a kopek, Yeruchem disappeared either on the way to a 'good Jew,' or else he went begging through the country. . . and Beinishe remained with Grüne!

"Truly, the ways of the Most High are past finding out! It seems ridiculous! He was a lad and she was a girl, but it was all upside down. The woman, an engine,

a Cossack, and the husband, a misery, a bag of bones! And what do you think! She took him in hand and made a man of him!

"She was always setting him on Getzil, he was to prevent the congregation from taking out the scrolls until the matter was settled, prevent Getzil from being called up to the Law. . . . it made as much impression as throwing a pea at a wall. Getzil cuffed him, and after that the young fellow was ashamed to appear in the house-of-study. Once, just before Passover, when all devices had failed, Grüne again drove Beinishe to his uncle, and drove him with a broom! Beinishe went again, and again the uncle turned him out. I tell you—it *was* a thing to happen! My second wife (to be) had just been divorced from her first husband, and she was Grüne's lodger; and she saw Beinishe come home with her own eyes; he was more dead than alive, and shook as if he had the fever; and my good-woman was experienced in that sort of thing (she had been the matron of the Hekdesh before it was burnt down), and she saw that something serious had happened.

"It was just about the time when Grüne was to come home (she sold rolls) from market, and she would have knocked him down; and my good-wife advised him, out of compassion, to lie down and rest on the stove; and he, poor man, was like a dummy, tell him to do a thing and he did it; he got up on the stove.

"Grüne came home, my good-woman said nothing; Beinishe lay and slept, or pretended to sleep, on the stove!<sup>1</sup> And perhaps he was not quite clear in his head,

<sup>1</sup> See note p. 112.

because, when Getzil was turning him out of the house, he cried out that he would tell where they had hidden Getzil's son, and if he had been clear in the head, he would not have said a thing like that.

"However that may be, the words made a great impression on Getzil's wife. May my enemies know of their life what Beinishe knew of the whereabouts of Jonah-Getzil's! But there, a woman, a mother, an only son! . . . so, what do you think? She had a grocery shop, got a porter and a bag of Passover-flour, and had it carried after her to Grüne.

"She goes in . . . (such a pity, my wife isn't here! she was an eye-witness of it, and when she tells the story, it is enough to make you split with laughter); she goes in, leaves the porter outside the room.

"'Good morning, Grüne!' Grüne makes no reply, and Getzil's wife begins to get frightened.

"'Where,' she asks, 'is Beinishe?' 'The black year knows!' answers Grüne, and turns to the fire-place, where she goes on skimming the soup. He must have gone to inform, she thinks. She calls in the porter, the sack of meal is put down, Grüne does not see, or pretends she doesn't, devil knows which! Getzil's wife begins to flush and tremble, 'Grünishe, we are relatives . . . one blood—call him back! Why should he destroy himself and my soul with him?'

"Then only Grüne turned round. She was no fool, and soon took in the situation. She got a few more rubles out of them, and made believe to go after Beinishe . . . It was soon rumored in the town that Beinishe was an informer . . . and Grüne was glad of it . . . she

kept Beinishe on the stove, and bullied and drew blood at every householder's where there was anything wrong."

"At that rate, *she* was the informer?"

"First she, and then he himself. In his misery, he took to drink, hung about at night in the public-houses, threatened to 'inform' all on his own account. He never gave Grüne a penny, and spent all he had in dissipation. It was sad—a man like that to end so!"

"What happened?"

"He burnt up his inside with drink. First he went mad, and ran about in the streets, or lay out somewhere for weeks under a hedge. But home to Grüne—not for any money!"

"Even when he was quite a wreck, ten men couldn't get him back into his house. He fought and bit. He had to be brought into the house-of-study (the Hek-desh was no longer in existence), and there he died! They tried to save him, called in a specialist, recited Psalms."

"The Lamed-Wòfnik, too?"

"Certainly!"

"Well?"

"A man with no inside—what could you expect?"



XVI

THE OUTCAST



## XVI

### THE OUTCAST

May had been cold and wet from beginning to end. People began to feel as if summer would never come, as if it would go on freezing and raining forever. At last, the day before Pentecost, the sun shone out.

"Torah is light!" said my father, with proud satisfaction, and began to look for the 'Tikun'<sup>1</sup> for the night of Pentecost.

"In honor of the holy feast-day!" exclaimed my mother, joyfully, and went back with fresh courage to her cake-making.

"I am going to bake Gelle Challeh!"<sup>2</sup> she called to us.

Soon the house was filled with the smell of freshly-kneaded dough, saffron, cinnamon and cloves, sugared cheese and melted butter.

My younger sister Hannah took no part in what was going forward.

She sat by the window over a book, but she read nothing, and her eyes stared anxiously out into the street.

Our mother called on her several times for help, but Hannah did not even answer. . . . .

The pale face wears a scornful smile . . . . the delicate

<sup>1</sup> Order of service.

<sup>2</sup> Bread made with saffron.

lips open, she is about to speak! But she remains silent, and fastens her eyes upon her book.

"Lazy thing!" grumbles our mother, "always poring over books! Working-day or holiday, it's all the same to her!"

Our father, who rarely interferes in household matters, having found the book and dusted it, lies down to sleep before bathing, to prepare for being up at night.

Our mother stops complaining, lest she should wake him. She calls me quietly to her, gives me a few pennies, and tells me to go down-stairs and buy a bit of green, and some colored paper with which to festoon the windows.

Heaven knows, I am unwilling enough to leave the room wherein stands a bowl of sweet cream, another of sugared cheese, and where packets of currants and raisins lie all about. At the same time, going to buy, to bargain over, and to pay for greenery and paper, was still more seductive, and away I run.

And it turned out to be such a dreadful Pentecost!

Hannah, my sister, ran away!

We had gone to prayers, and my mother had lain down to rest before blessing the lights . . . . It was then they gave a signal—my mother remembered afterwards hearing a terrible whistle in her sleep. And she left us, and went over to our enemies! And the time she chose was Pentecost, the season of the giving of our Law! . . . It was then she left us.

Everything passes away, joy and sorrow, good and

evil, and still we go forward on our way to the land where all things are forgotten—or remembered anew.

Everything we have lived through lies beneath our feet like stones in a beaten track, like gravestones under which we have buried our friends, good and bad.

But I cannot forget Hannah!

The life she had sought so eagerly spurned her from it, the vision of happiness faded into thin air, the flowers turned to sharp thorns in her grasp!

There was no return possible.

In her way stood the Law and two graves: her father's grave and her mother's.

Where is she?

Once every year, on the eve of Pentecost, she shows herself to me again.

She appears in the street, she stands outside at the window, as if she were afraid, as if she had not the power to enter a Jewish home.

She gazes with staring eyes into the room, and sees me there alone.

She looks at me with dismay, supplication, and anger. I understand her.

"Where are they?" she asks in dismay. "Have pity on me!" she says, imploring. And then, in anger, she lays the whole blame of the disaster on us:

"What could I know of your bitter feud with *them*? You knew, you learned all about it in school, *my* books told me nothing, not a word!

"Living in the same house with you, I led a separate life. My story-books were like mirrors filled with the

bright reflection of other women's lives, and, as I read, my own appeared there in all its dreariness!

"I have betrayed something?

"I have been false? To what?

"I only exchanged saffron cakes for cakes of another sort, the tales in Mother's books of legends for others far more vivid and entrancing—a bit of green in the window for the free, fresh green of the woods and fields—litanies for romances—the narrow, stifling routine of my daily life for sunshine and flowers, for gladness and love! I never betrayed *you*—I never knew you!

"I knew nothing of your sorrow, you never spoke to me of yourselves. Why did you not tell me of *your* love, of the love which is your very being, why did you not tell me of *your* beauty—of the terrible, blood-stained beauty of Israel?

"The beautiful, the precious, the exalted in our religion, you hid it in yourselves, you men, you kept it from me, you kept it from us.

"Of me, of us, with our flesh and blood, with the strength of our youth struggling and crying out for *life*—of us you asked only butter-cake and Gelle Challeh!

"You cast us out!"

---

He who is high above all peoples, who alone can see clearly through their tangled web of prejudice and hatred—*He* shall judge her.

XVII

A CHAT



## XVII

### A CHAT

It is warm, real holiday weather, and Reb Shachneh, a tall, thin Jew, one of the last old Kotzkers,<sup>1</sup> and Reb Zerach, one of the few remaining old Belzers,<sup>1</sup> are taking a stroll outside the town.

As young men they had been enemies, hating each other heart and soul. Reb Shachneh led the Kotzkers against the Belzers, and Reb Zerach, the Belzers against the Kotzkers.

But now that they are old, and Kotzkers are "not what they were," and Belzers have lost their "go," they have separated themselves from their former associates, and left the meeting-rooms where less pious, but younger and stronger, men have taken the lead.

They made peace in the synagogue, in winter time, beside the stove, and now, on this intermediate day of Passover, on the first fine afternoon, they have come out together for a walk.

The sun shines in a wide, blue sky. The little grasses are springing up through the mould, and one can distinctly see the angel who stands beside each blade, and cries: grow, grow!

Little birds fly about in flocks, looking for last year's nests, and Reb Shachneh says to Reb Zerach:

"A Kotzker, you see, I mean a real Kotzker—the pres-

<sup>1</sup> Followers of the Kotzk and Belz Rebbes, respectively.

ent ones don't count—never thought much of the Haggadah.”<sup>1</sup>

“But only of the dumplings?” smiles Reb Zerach.

“Never mind about the dumplings!” answers Reb Shachneh, gravely, “and don't laugh. You know the meaning of ‘thou shalt not deliver up a slave to his master?’”

“For me,” says the Belzer with humble pride, “it is enough to know the hidden meaning of the prayers!”

Reb Shachneh pretends not to have heard, and continues:

“The literal interpretation is simple enough: If a slave, or a servant, or a serf, run away, one may not, according to the Law, catch him, bind him, and give him up to his master—it is evident, if a man runs away, his very life was endangered. But the hidden meaning is also quite clear: the body here below is a slave—it is the servant of the soul. The body is sinful, it sees a piece of pork, an idol, a woman, what not, and is ready to jump out of its skin. But when the soul says, thou shalt not! it must desist.

“On the other hand, suppose the soul desires to perform a religious act. The body must be up and doing, however tired and harassed. The hands must work, the feet must run, the lips move—and why? The soul, the lord, commands! And therefore it is written: ‘Thou shalt not deliver up!’

“The body may not be handed over unconditionally to the soul. The fiery soul would speedily burn it to

<sup>1</sup>The service read in the home on the first (and the second) Passover eve.

ashes. Had the Creator wished for souls without bodies, he would not have made the world.

"The body also has its rights. 'He who fasts much is a sinner.' The body must eat. He who would ride must feed his horse! Comes a feast, a holiday—be merry, too! Take a sip of brandy, rejoice, body, likewise! And the soul rejoices and the body rejoices—the soul in the benediction, and the body in the glass!

"Passover, the season of our deliverance—here, body, catch a dumpling! And it is inspirited and cheered, and rejoices to fulfil the commandment.

"Farewell, dumpling! Brother, do not laugh."

Reb Zerach opines that the matter is a deep one and worth consideration; but he himself does not eat Sheruyah?<sup>1</sup>

"Do you *enjoy* Passover cakes dry?"

"For dessert?" smiles Reb Zerach. "And where are my teeth to eat them with?"

"How then do you observe the precept: 'And thou shalt rejoice in thy feasts,' as regards the body?"

"All sorts of ways. If it likes currant wine—well and good. I myself revel in the Haggadah. I sit and repeat and count the plagues, and count and double them and multiply."

"Materialism!"

"Materialism? After all the misery and the hard labor—after the long exile of the Divine Presence? In my opinion, there ought to be a custom introduced of repeating the plagues seven times, and seven times 'Pour out thy wrath!' But the great thing is the plagues! I

<sup>1</sup> Passover cakes soaked in broth or other liquid.

delight in them. I wish I could open the door at the plagues—let *them* hear! Why should I be afraid? Do you suppose *they* understand Hebrew?”

Reb Shachneh is silent for a while, and then he relates the following:

“Listen! This is what happened one day with us. I assure you I won’t exaggerate. In perhaps the tenth house from the Rebbe’s of blessed memory, there lived a Shochet who was (may I be forgiven for saying so—he is no more of this world) a mad butcher, a butcher among butchers, one in a thousand. A neck like a bull’s, eyebrows like bristles, hands like logs, and a voice, a voice! When he spoke, it sounded like distant thunder, or musketry. He must have been at one time or another a Belzer.”

“Well, well,” growls Reb Zerach.

“Well, and,” continues Reb Shachneh, coolly, “he used to pray with the most extravagant gestures, with shouts and whispers.

“His ‘they shall remember’ reminded one of sprinkling fire with water.”

“Let that pass!”

“You can fancy the uproar when a fellow like this sat down to the Haggadah. In the Rebbe’s chamber we could hear every word. He read, of course, like a butcher, and the laugh went round.

“The Rebbe of blessed memory scarcely moved his lips, and yet everyone could see that he was smiling. Later, however, when the butcher began to count the plagues, so that they shot from his mouth like bullets, and brought his fist down on the table, so that the glasses

rang again, the Rebbe of blessed memory became melancholy."

"Melancholy? On a feast-day? Passover? What do you mean?"

"Well, we asked him the reason why!"

"And what did he answer?"

"God Himself," was his reply, "became melancholy on the occasion of the Exodus."

"Where had he found that?"

"It's a Midrash!<sup>1</sup> When the children of Israel had crossed the Red Sea, and the water had covered up and drowned Pharaoh and all his host, then the angels began to sing songs, seraphim and ophanim flew into all the seven heavens with hymns and glad tidings, all the stars and planets danced and sang, and the celestial bodies—you can guess what rejoicings! But the Creator put an end to them. A Voice issued from the Throne:

"My children are being drowned in the sea, and you rejoice and sing?"

"Because God created even Pharaoh and all his host, even the devil himself, and it is written: 'His tender mercies are over all His works.'"

"Certainly!" sighs Reb Zerach.

He says nothing more for a while, and then asks:

"And if it is a Midrash, what has he added to it to deserve praise?"

Reb Shachneh stands still, and says gravely:

"First, Belzer fool, no one has the duty to be original; there is no chronological order in the Law—the new is old, the old is new. Secondly, he showed us why we re-

<sup>1</sup> Rabbinical amplification of the Biblical text.

cite the Haggadah, even the plagues in the Haggadah, to a mournful "Sinni" tune, a tune that is steeped in grief.

"Thirdly, he translated the precept: *Al tismàch Yisroel el Gil ko-Ammim*: Materialist, rejoice not in a coarse way—you are no boor! Revenge is not for Jews."

XVIII

THE PIKE



## XVIII

### THE PIKE<sup>1</sup>

In honor of the feast-day, live fish have been bought.

Two large pike are lying in a great, green glass bowl filled with water, and a little further off, in one of blackened earthenware, two or three small carp. These are no sea-folk, but they come out of a fairly wide river, and they are straightened for room in the bowls.

The poor little carp, in the one of black glaze, have been aware of its confines for some time past.

They have lain for a good hour by the clock, wondering what sort of a prison this may be.

And there is plenty of leisure for thinking. It may be long before the cook comes home from market with good things for the feast-day long enough for even a carp to have an idea.

But the pike in the glass bowl have not taken in the situation yet. Time after time they swim out strongly and bang their heads against the hard glass.

Pike have iron heads but dull wits. The two captive heroes have received each a hundred knocks from every part of the bowl, but they have not yet realized that all is closed to them.

They *feel* the walls, but the weak pike-eyes do not *see* them.

<sup>1</sup> This is an allegory referring to certain aspects of Zionism.

The glass is green—it is just like river water—and yet there is no getting out.

“It is witchcraft!” says one pike to the other.

The other agrees with him.

“To-morrow there is an auction. The other bidders have bewitched us.”

“Some crayfish or frog has done this.”

---

It is only a short time since the net drew them out of the water. When they got into the air they had fainted, to recover consciousness inside a barrel of which the lid had been hammered down.

“How the days are drawing in!” they had observed both at once.

There was very little room in the barrel, scarcely sufficient to turn in, and hardly water enough for anyone to breathe. What with having fainted before, and now this difficulty in breathing, they had fallen into a doze, and had dreamt of all sorts of things, of the fair, and even of the opera and the ballet. But the dream-angel never showed them any kind of barrel.

They heard nothing, not even the opening of the barrel and the hubbub of the market.

Neither perceived they the trembling of the scales in which they oscillated whilst the cook haggled over them with the fish-wife—or remarked the click-clack of the pointer that spoke their doom.

They slept still more soundly in the cook's basket, starting into life again only in the bowl, beneath the rush of cold water. And now, after doing unwilling

penance for an hour against the glass, they have only just hit upon witchcraft.

"What are we to do?" says one to the other.

The carp know themselves to be in prison.

They, too, have had experience of a long night, and awoke in a bowl.

"Someone," say they, "has palmed off counterfeit bank-notes on us!"

It will be proved, they are sure, if only one could get hold of someone who will take the matter up properly.

They give a little leap into the air, catch sight of the pike, and fall back more dead than alive.

"They are going to eat us!" they say, trembling. Not until they realize that the pike are likewise in prison do they feel somewhat reassured.

"They, they certainly have been passing counterfeit notes, too!" says one carp to the other.

"Yes, and therein lies our salvation. *They* will not keep silence, and, with God's help, we shall all be set free together."

"And they will see us, and, with God's help, will eat us up!"

And the carp nestle closer against the bowl.

They can just see a tub full of onions on the kitchen floor.

"If we signed the contract, we might receive a golden order," observes one of the pike.

"Please God, we shall be decorated yet," answers the other. "It is a case of witchcraft, but—"

"But what?"

"There is one thing."

"Well?"

"It sounds almost absurd—but—I wanted to tell you—we ought to *pray*," he stammers, "it is the best thing against sorcery!"

"To pray? Perhaps so!!" Whereupon the two pike discover that it is years since they prayed last.

They cannot remember a word.

"Ashrè,"<sup>1</sup> begins one.

"Ashrè," repeats the other, and comes to a standstill.

"Oh, I want to pray!" moans the first.

"So do I!" chimes in the second, "for when all is said and done, we are but *fish*!"

A door opens in the wall, a little way, and two heads are seen in the aperture—a tipsy-looking man's head, and a woman's with curl papers.

"Ah," exclaims the man's head, joyously, "this is something like! Pike—carp—and all the other good things."

"I should hope so! And I have sent for meat besides."

"My knowing little wife," chuckles the man's head.

"There, there, that will do."

And the heads disappear.

"Did you hear?" says a pike, "there are carp, too."

"They have the best of it."

"How is that?"

"To begin with, they have made no contracts, they are free agents. Secondly, they can leap."

"If they would only give a *good* leap, they would find themselves back in the river."

"Quite true."

<sup>1</sup> "Happy, etc.," Ps. lxxxiv. 5, three times daily in the prayers.

"And something good might come of it for us. Wait a bit—let's try! Carp!"

The carp have suddenly swum to the surface of the water, and are poking their noses over the edge of the bowl.

The pike, face to face with the carp:

"Bad luck, brothers?" he exclaimed.

"Bad," answer the carp.

"Bitter?"

"Bitter!"

"Very little water?"

"Oh, very little!"

"And it smells?"

"Ugh!"

"Not fit to live in?"

"Not fit!"

"We must get home, back to the river!"

"We—must!"

"We have forgotten what it was like in the river."

"Forgotten!"

"A sin!"

"A mortal sin!"

"Let us beat our head against the wall and do penance."

The carp flatten their bellies against the bowl. The pike run their head against the glass till it rings again.

"One should leap away home!" continues the pike.

"One should leap!"

"Well—leap!"

The pike commands, and the carp are out of the bowl and on the floor—lying there more dead than alive.

"I never knew," says the second pike, "that you were such an orator—your lips drop honey!"

The carp meanwhile are moaning.

"Hurry up!" orders the pike.

The carp give another little spring.

"Oh," they moan, "we do not see any river—and our bones are breaking—and we cannot breathe."

"On with you—make an effort! It is not much further—give a jump!"

But the carp are past hearing.

The carp lie dying on the floor, and the pike are having a dispute.

Both opine that any proper leap would carry one into the river, but one says that other fish are wanted, not stupid carp, who can only leap in the water, who cannot exist for an hour without food, and that what are wanted are—electric fish!

And the other says: "No, carp—only, lots and lots of carp. If one hundred thousand carp were to leap, *one* would certainly fall into the river, and if *one* fell in, why, then—ha, ha!"

XIX

THE FAST



## XIX

### THE FAST

A winter's night; Sarah sits by the oil-lamp, darning an old sock. She works slowly, for her fingers are half-frozen; her lips are blue and brown with cold; every now and then she lays down her work and runs up and down the room to warm her icy feet.

In a bed, on a bare straw mattress, sleep four children—two little heads at each end—covered up with some old clothes.

Now one child and now another gives a start, a head is raised, and there is a plaintive chirp: "Hungry!"

"Patience, dears, patience!" says Sarah, soothingly,

"Father will be here presently, and bring you some supper. I will be sure to wake you."

"And something hot?" ask the children, whimpering.

"We have had nothing hot to-day yet!"

"And something hot, too!"

But she does not believe what she is saying.

She glances round the room—perhaps, after all, there is something left that she can pawn. Nothing! Four bare, damp walls—split stove—everything clammy and cold—two or three broken dishes on the chimney-piece—on the stove, an old, battered Chanukah lamp—overhead, in the beam, a nail—sole relic of a lamp that hung from the ceiling; two empty beds without pillows—and nothing, nothing else!

The children are some time getting to sleep.

Sarah's heart aches as she looks at them.

Suddenly she turns her eyes, red with crying, to the door—she has heard footsteps, heavy footsteps, on the stairs leading down into the basement—a clatter of cans against the wall, now to the right, now to the left.

A gleam of hope illumines her sunken features.

She rubs one foot against the other two or three times, rises stiffly, and goes to the door.

She opens it, and in comes a pale, stoop-shouldered Jew, with two empty cans.

"Well?" she whispers.

He puts away the cans, takes off his yoke, and answers, lower still:

"Nothing—nothing at all; nobody paid me. To-morrow! they said. Everyone always says to-morrow—the day after to-morrow—on the first day of the month!"

"The children have hardly had a bite all day," articulates Sarah. "Anyway, they're asleep—that is something. O, my poor children!"

She can control herself no longer, and begins to cry quietly.

"What are you crying for?" asks the man.

"O, Mendele, the children are so hungry." She is making desperate efforts to gulp down her tears.

"And what is to become of us?" she moans. "Things only get worse and worse!"

"Worse? No, Sarah! It is a sin to speak so. We are better off than we were this time last year. I had no food to give you, and no shelter. The children

were all day rolling in the gutter, and they slept in the dirty courts. Now, at least, they sleep on straw, they have a roof over their head."

Sarah's sobs grow louder.

She has been reminded of the child that was taken from her out there in the streets. It caught cold, grew hoarse, and died—and died, as it might have died in the forest, without help of any kind—no tearing open the Ark<sup>1</sup>—no measuring of graves—nothing said over it to exorcise the evil eye—it went out like a candle.

He tries to comfort her:

"Don't cry, Sarah; don't cry so! Do not sin against God!"

"Oh, Mendele, if only He would help us!"

"Sarah, for your own sake don't take things so to heart. See what a figure you have made of yourself. Do you know, it is ten years to-day since we were married? Well, well, who would think you were the beauty of the town!"

"And you, Mendele; do you remember, you were called Mendele the strong—and now you are bent double, you are ill—and you don't tell me! O, my God, my God!"

The cry escapes her, the children are startled out of their sleep, and begin to wail anew: "Bread! Hungry!"

"Who ever heard of such a thing! Who is going to

<sup>1</sup> When the weeping female relatives of the sick force their way through the male congregation to the Ark, throw it open, and bedew the scrolls with their tears.

think of eating to-day!" is Mendele's sudden exclamation.

The children sit up in alarm.

"This is a fast-day!" continues Mendele with a stern face.

Several minutes elapse before the children take in what has been said to them.

"What sort of fast is it?" they inquire tearfully.

And Mendele with downcast eyes tells them that in the morning, during the Reading of the Law, the Scroll fell from the desk. "Whereupon," he continues, "a fast was proclaimed, in which even sucking-children are to take part." The children are silent, and he goes on to say:

"A fast like that on the Day of Atonement, beginning overnight."

The four children tumble out of bed; bare-footed, in their little ragged shirts, they begin to caper round the room, shouting: "We are going to fast, to fast, to fast!"

Mendele screens the light with his shoulders, so that they shall not see their mother's tears:

"There, that will do, children, that will do! Fast-days were not meant for dancing. When the Rejoicing of the Law comes, then we will dance, please God!" The children get back into bed. Their hunger is forgotten.

One of them, a little girl, starts singing: "Our Father, our King," etc., and "On the High Mountain," etc.

Mendele shivers from head to foot.

"One does not sing, either," he says in a choked voice.

The children are silent, and go off to sleep, tired out with singing and dancing. Only the eldest opens his eyes once more and inquires of his father:

"Tate, when shall I be Bar-Mitzwah?"<sup>1</sup>

"Not yet, not for a long time—in another four years. You must grow and get strong."

"Then you will buy me a pair of phylacteries?"

"Of course."

"And a little bag to hold them?"

"Why, certainly!"

"And a little, tiny prayer-book with gilt edges?"

"With God's help! You must pray to God, Chaïmle!"

"Then I shall keep all the fasts!"

"Yes, yes, Chaïmle, all the fasts," adding, below his breath: "Lord of the world, only not any like this one—not like to-day's."

<sup>1</sup> Confirmed.



XX

THE WOMAN MISTRESS HANNAH



## XX

### THE WOMAN MISTRESS HANNAH

#### A PACKET OF LETTERS

#### 1

Two letters which Hannah received from her brother Menachem Mendil, and one letter from her sister-in-law, Eva Gütel; altogether, three letters.

#### FIRST LETTER

Life and peace to my worthy sister, Mistress Hannah.

I have received your letter, and I can tell you, I wept tears enough over it, and lay sighing and groaning one whole night long. But what was the good, seeing God in heaven is witness that I can do nothing to help you? And as to what you write about the inheritance, I must tell you, dear sister, there is no sense in it. According to the Jewish law, you have no claim upon any part. Ask your husband, he is learned, he will tell you the same thing. But you need not wait for him to tell you: a clever woman like you can open the "German Pentateuch" and see for herself that Zelophehad's daughters only inherited because there were no sons. As soon as there are sons, the daughters inherit nothing, and our father left no deed directing you were to inherit half as much as his male descendants.

And all you say about our father, peace be upon him,

not having given you the whole of your dowry, has nothing in it, because, if you come to think, who *does* get the whole? You know *I* did not, and yet I have no claim on anyone.

Besides, common sense will tell you that if our father, peace be upon him, did not keep to his engagement, neither did the other side, and so the matter rested. The two parties forgave each other, as is the custom among us Jews.

I would not trust my own judgment, but talked the matter over with our rabbi and his assistants, and we were all agreed that so it should be.

Further, as regards your contention that you boarded at home only half a year instead of a whole one—I know nothing about it. Our father, peace be upon him, never told me. And you know quite well that just then I was living separated from my family and spent the whole time at the Rebbe's, long life to him! and Eva Gütel tells me it was this way: there was a bit of a dispute between you over our mother's seat in the women's Shool (peace be upon her), and you tore each other's hair, and our mother (peace be upon her) was greatly distressed. And one Sabbath evening you picked up your bundle and your husband and were off to his native town. If so, what do we owe you?

Whom do you mean in your letter? Who asked you to run away? When people want to board, they should board.

But heaven forbid that I should distress you with reproaches! I only wish to show you how unjust you are. Of course, right or wrong, one has to act accord-

ing to law, specially in the case of a sister. Only—what is the good of wishing? If one can't, one can't! You must know, dear sister, that before our father of blessed memory departed, he made a will, by which he left the large Talmud to the large house-of-study and the small edition to the small house-of-study; the Mishnayes and the Bible were to be sent to the meeting-room where he used to recite the prayers—the funeral cost two hundred gulden, and I distributed alms to the amount of fifty gulden—what am I saying? a great deal more than fifty. I divided our father's clothes among the poor, except the silk cloak, which I am keeping, agreeably to the will, for my little Mösheh, so that in a propitious hour he may walk in it to the marriage canopy, and may it be soon, even in our days, amen! What remains?

Nothing remains but the house. Well it isn't worth insuring. Even the roof, not of you be it said, has the falling-sickness—it hangs by a hair. The town-justice says, the old fire-wall must be taken down, and altogether it's in a dangerous state.

You fancy, dear sister, that I am doing well for myself! When our father died and there was an end of board, I let the three little rooms to the left to Grunem, the dealer, called Grunem Tzop (you must have known him and his wife Zlate). I worry along with the money, and can only just pay the taxes and other duties that grow from day to day. Meantime I try dodges, give the collector a sip of brandy—come later, come to-morrow! and so on, but the rope round my neck tightens every day, and what the end of it will be, heaven only knows!

I live in the three rooms to the right, that are one with the inn and the public room. Times are very bad, the villages round about have taken the pledge not to drink brandy. Beside this, the land-owner has opened cheap eating shops and tea houses for the peasants—what more need I say? It's despair! One may stare one's eyes out before one sees a peasant come.

You say in your letter that everyone from here tells you I am flourishing. The fact is, people see the possessions of others with bigger eyes. One has to struggle for every dreier, and meanwhile there is Beile-Sasha's wedding coming, and I am getting old and gray with it all! The expenses are endless; they will lend you nothing; there is still a silk over-robe wanting for the wedding outfit, and as soon as the wedding is over, my Eva Gütel must consult a doctor. If Shmüel, the Röfeh, advises her to go, you can imagine the condition she must be in. I consulted the Rebbe (long life to him), and he also advised her going to Warsaw. Her cough gets worse every day—you would think people were chopping wood in the room.

And as to your trying to frighten me by saying that if I don't behave myself, you will write to our relative in Lublin, and she will go to her lawyer, and have me handed over to the Gentiles—you know, my dear sister, that I am not the least afraid. First, because a pious woman like you, my sister, knows very well what a Jewish court is and (lehavdil) what a Gentile court is. You wouldn't do anything so stupid! No Jewish woman would do that! And, even if you wanted to, you have a husband, and he would never allow such a shameful pro-

ceeding. He would never dare to show himself to his Rebbe or at the Stübel again.

Besides that, I advise you not to throw away money on lawyers, they are incredible people; you give and give, and the moment you stop giving, they don't know who you are.

And I must remind you of the Tomàshef story which our father, on whom be peace, used to tell. You may have forgotten it, so I will tell it you over again. In Tomàshef there died a householder, and his daughter, a divorced woman, fell upon the assessor—he was to give her a share in the inheritance, according to *their* custom. As she stood talking with the assessor, a coal sprang out of the hearth in her room at home, the room took fire, and a child of hers (not of you or any Jew be it said again) was burned.

And I advise you, sister Hannah, to be sorry, and do penance for what you have written. Trouble, as they say, steals a man's wits—but it might, heaven forbid, be brought against you, and you ought to impose something on yourself, if only a day's fasting.

I, for my part, forgive you with my whole heart, and if, please God, you come to my daughter's wedding, everything will be made up, and we shall all be happy together. Only forbear, for heaven's sake, to begin again about going to law.

And I am vexed on account of your husband, who says nothing to me about his health; if he is angry with me, he commits a sin; he must know what is written about the sinfulness of anger, besides which there is a rumor current that he was not once at the Rebbe's during the

Solemn Days, but prayed all the while in the house-of-study, and they also say that he intends to abandon study and take up something or other else. He says he intends to work with his hands. You can imagine the grief this is to me. Because what shall become of the Torah? And who shall study if not a clever head like him?

He must know that our father, on whom be peace, did not agree to the marriage on *that* condition. And especially nowadays, when the "nations-of-the-world" are taking to trade, and business decreases daily, it is for the women to do business and for the men to devote themselves to the Torah, and then God may have mercy on us. It would be better for him to get a diploma as a rabbi, or let him become a Shochet or a teacher—anything—only not a trader! If I were only sure that he wouldn't turn my child's heart away from *my* Rebbe, I would send him my Mösheh'le for teaching and board.

See to it that your husband gives up those silly notions, and do you buy a shop or a stall—and may the merits of the fathers on your side and on his be your help and stay!

Further, I advise you to throw off the melancholy with which your letter is penetrated, so that it is heart-breaking to read. A human being without faith is worse than a beast. He goes about the world like an orphan without a father. We have a God in heaven, blessed be He, and He will not forsake us.

When a person falls into melancholy, it is a sign that he has no faith and no trust. And this leads, heaven forbid, to worse things, the very names of which shall not pass my lips.

Write me also, sister Hannah, how peas are selling with you. Our two great traders—you remember them? the lame Yochanan and the blind Yoneh—have raised the price, and our nobleman cannot get any for seed—one might do a little business. It may be heaven's will that I should make a trifle toward wedding expenses. Of course, I don't mean you to do me a kindness for nothing. If anything comes of it, I will send you some money, so that you and your husband may come to Beile-Sasha's wedding—and I will give a present for you—a wedding present from the bride's family.

Eva Gütel sends you her very friendly greetings; she does not write herself because it is fair-day; there are two produce dealers here of the Samoscz gluttons, and they insist on having stuffed fish. The bride has gone to the tailor's to be measured for a dress, and I am left alone to keep an eye on the Gentile cooks.

Try now, dear sister, for heaven's sake, not to take things to heart and to have faith. He who feeds the worm in the earth and the bird in its nest, will not forsake you.

Greet your husband.

From me, your brother  
MENACHEM MENDIL.

#### SECOND LETTER

Life and peace to my sister Mistress Hannah.

I have received your second letter. It was soaked with tears and full of insults directed against me, my wife Eva Gütel, and even the bride, Beile-Sasha, and it has

upset me very much, for why? You say, sister Hannah, that I am a bandit, that I met you, heaven forbid, in a wood, and, heaven forbid, murdered you; that it was I and my wife, Eva Gütel, who drove you from the house; that Beile-Sasha, in your opinion, is a hussy, because she is ordering silk dresses—what am I to say? I must listen in silence, knowing the trouble you are in—that it is not you that speak, but your heavy heart.

But it is not as you think. I am no murderer, thank heaven! And were any one to come from the street and declare that the cloak I am wearing is his, and that he is going to law about it, I should go with him to the rabbi's without a word. And if, God willing, you come to the wedding, we will go together and have it out.

And see here: About the board you did not eat, you confess yourself in your letter that it came about through a quarrel between you and my wife (it's not my affair who began it), and all I see is, that your husband was a great booby—"that he followed after his wife." They say that you ran away in the evening following Sabbath, and made yourselves a laughing-stock. Our father was greatly distressed, and it shortened his days (he said so plainly—neighbors heard it), and you put it all on Eva Gütel! It's a calumny!

But what is done, is done! Our father lies in his grave. There can be no more question of board or anything else.

And you know very well that Beile-Sasha, the bride, is no hussy. She, poor thing, is quite innocent in the matter. Her future father-in-law, the Takif,<sup>1</sup> forced me

<sup>1</sup> A man of influence. Hebrew.

to order the silk dresses. Once even she cried, and said it would ruin us, but what am I to do, when the contract says "in dresses of silk and satin," and he will hear of no alteration—it's take it or leave it. And there would be no choice but to see my daughter an old maid.

And you know the dowry will not be given entirely in cash. I have promised six, and given three, hundred rubles; I have mortgaged the house for two hundred rubles, and you know the house stands in our father's name, so that I had to pay extra—and now I am so short of money that may God have mercy on me.

But what is the use of telling that to a woman! Our sages were right when they said: "Women are feather-brained," and there is the proverb: "Long hair (in girls, of course) and short wits." I shall write separately to your husband; he is a man learned in the Law, and he will know that one human being should not lean upon another, because, as we are told, a human being can only just support himself. One must have faith.

And I am convinced that God will not forsake you. He does not forsake the weakest fly. The Almighty alone can help you, you must pray to Him, and I, for my part, when next I am, God willing, at *his* house<sup>1</sup> (long life to him), I shall make a special offering in your behalf. That *must* help.

As to the peas, the business is off. Before there was time to turn, Gabriel, the tenant, had brought several cartloads from your part of the country—he has made a fortune. He is about to marry a son and has actually

<sup>1</sup> The Rebbe's.

given a dowry! It so pleased God that you should not be able to afford a stamp, your answer was belated, and Gabriel is the winner.

And as to what you write about your child being poorly, you must consult the Röfeh. Don't fancy it in danger. Keep up your spirits. I have done my part: I got up quite early, went to the great house-of-study, dropped a coin into the collecting box of Meïr Baal-Ness, wrote on the east wall "for complete recovery," in big letters, and as soon as we have made a little money I will send some candles to the Shool. I will also tell the Rebbe, and *not* explain that your husband is no follower of *his*. And you know that I am quite a son of the house.

From me, thy brother

MENACHEM MENDIL.

My wife, Eva Gütel, sends you a very friendly greeting; the bride, another. One of these days, God willing, you will receive an invitation to the wedding, and may it bring us all good luck.

MENACHEM MENDIL, the above.

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#### THIRD LETTER

To my beloved sister-in-law and worthy relative, the excellent woman, Mistress Hannah.

I beg to inform you that from this time on *I* shall receive your letters, and not my tender-hearted husband, and *I*—I will burn them.

Secondly, my dear sister-in-law, between ourselves, it was great forwardness on your part to fall upon us just

before the wedding, turning our days into nights, and now you wish to blight our married life with discord. You must fancy that you are still boarding with my father-in-law, a spoiled only daughter that has never learned manners; and just because you can't have the moon to play with, you are ready to scratch people's eyes out, turn the world upside down, and your cries pierce the heavens. I can hear you now, tapping with your feet, and the bang of your fist on the table, while your ninny of a husband goes into the corner, wags his sheep's head, and his ear-locks shake like Lulavim; and father-in-law, may he forgive me, lets the spoiled child have her way.

Dear sister-in-law Hannah! It is time to awaken from sleep, to forget the empty dreams, and to realize the kind of world one is in. My father-in-law of blessed memory has long lain in his grave—there is an end to boarding. You can only be spoiled by your husband now, and I—show you twice five fingers.

And I have told the postman to deliver your letters to *me*, not to my husband, my innocent lamb. You know, dear sister-in-law, that people are scandalized at the way you go on. Whoever hears of it thinks you are possessed. Soril the Neggidah<sup>1</sup> told me plainly, she thought you deserved to be crimped like a fish. And I cannot make out what it is you want of me. It was not I, Eva Gütel, who wrote the Torah; it was not I, Eva Gütel, who descended on Sinai, with thunder and lightning, to deprive you of a share in the inheritance. And if my father-in-law was as great an idler as your

<sup>1</sup> Rich man's wife. Hebrew.

husband is a ninny, and no document made special provision for you, am I to blame? It is not for me to advise the Almighty, the keys of the Gate of Mercy are not in my pocket. There is a Somebody whom to implore. Have you no prayer-book, no Supplications? Pray, beg for mercy! And if your child is really ill, is there no Ark to tear open—are there no graves to measure—no pious offerings to make? But the only idea you have is: Eva Gütel! Eva Gütel, and once more, Eva Gütel! If you haven't Parnosseh, whose fault? Eva Gütel's, and you pour out upon her the bitterness of your heart. If the child is ill, whose fault? Of course, Eva Gütel's, and you scream my head off. God in heaven knows the truth, I am a sick woman; I struggle for breath, and if I am vexed, I am at death's door. And when the cough seizes me, I think it's all over—that I am done for. I live, as they say, with one foot in the house and one in the grave. And if the doctors order me abroad to drink the waters, I shall be left, heaven forbid, without so much as a chemise. And who is to look after the house, and the housekeeping, and the sick children, *wos?*

I think you know that the whole house depends on me, that Menachem Mendil has only to move to cause a disaster. Of all putty-fingers! A man that's no use to heaven or earth, can't put a hand into cold water—nothing! And now, as if I hadn't troubles enough, the doctor must needs come and say my liver is enlarged, the danger great, and, in fact, that way heaven have mercy on me! And *you* insisting that I am a rich woman who can help you!

Dear sister-in-law, I tell you, you have the heart of a Tartar, not that of a Jewish daughter; you are without compassion! It is time you left off writing those affectionate letters of yours. And, for heaven's sake, come to the wedding, which, please God, will be soon. *When*, I don't exactly know, and I will not be responsible for the day. Menachem Mendil shall go to the holy man and consult with him, so that it take place in a propitious hour. I will be sure to tell you. And you are not to bring presents, and if your husband, as I hope, comes with you, you will be among the privileged guests, and I will seat you at the top of the table. And the bride also begs very much that you will come to her wedding. Only you must behave well, remember where you are, and not put us to shame and confusion.

Greet your husband and wish the child a complete recovery.

From me, your sister-in-law

EVA GÜTEL.

2

Four letters which Hannah received from her husband, Shmùel Mösheh.

FIRST LETTER

To my beloved wife Mistress Hannah:

When my letter is given into your hands, I, Shmùel Mösheh, shall be already far away. And I beg you with my whole heart to forgive me for that same. I left you not of my own good will: I couldn't bear it any longer, I saw plainly that there was no help for it, that the

trouble was not to be borne. We have eaten up the dowry, the inheritance has been swallowed by your bandit of a brother. He used the time when the letters were passing between you to have the house entered in the name of his son-in-law's father. I couldn't set up any kind of business, I hadn't the wherewithal. There was nothing left for me but to hang myself, which heaven forbid, like Leezer, the tailor, or to run away to America. I chose America, so as at least not to lose the other world as well. And I shall not be idle there. With God's help and with the sweat of my brow and with my ten fingers, I will earn my bread, and perhaps God will have mercy and send a blessing into my ten fingers, and perhaps he will also bless your trade in onions, and bring us together again; either me to you or you to me. Amen, thus may it seem good in His sight.

And I beg of you, dear, good Hannah, not to take it to heart, not to cry so much! You know, I only go away for the sake of Parnosseh—a "bit of bread." You are my wife Hannah, and I am your husband, Shmùel Mös-heh, and we are both bound to the child, life and health to it. If there had only been a piece of dry bread, I wouldn't have done it. Perhaps He whose Name is blessed may meantime have compassion, and that, when your brother the bandit, hears that I, heaven forbid, have left you a grass-widow, he will be touched, his stony heart will soften, and he will perhaps send you a few rubles.

My precious Hannah, what am I to say to you? I must tell you that the idea of going away and leaving you with the child came into my head many and many a

time. I saw long ago that I had no other choice. I thought it over day and night, at prayer and at study.

I only waited till the child should be well. And when it got better, I hadn't the heart to tell you I wanted to go away, whither my eyes should take me. I was afraid you would say you wouldn't allow it, and that I should not be able to act against your will. So I kept everything to myself, ate my heart out in silence. But the day before yesterday, when you brought home a pound of bread, and divided it between me and the child, and said, you had eaten at our neighbor's, and I saw in your face, which turned all colors—because you cannot tell a lie—that you were fooling me, that you hadn't had a bite, then I felt how I was sinning against you. Eating the bread, I felt as if it were your flesh, and afterward, drinking a glass of tea, as if it were your blood. My eyes opened, and I saw, for the first time, what a sinner in Israel I was. And yet I was afraid to speak out. I ran away without your knowing.

I pawned my outer cloak and prayer-scarf to Yechiel the money-lender—but don't, for the love of heaven, let anyone know—and paid for my journey. And if I should be in need, Jews are charitable and will not let me fall dead in the street; and I have made a vow that later on, when His Name shall have had mercy, and I have earned something, to give it in charity, not only what I got, but more, too, if God so please.

You must understand, my precious Hannah, how hard and bitter it is for me to go away. When our dear only child was born, it never occurred to me that I should have to leave it fatherless, even for a time.

The night I left I must have stood over your bed an hour by the clock. You were asleep. And I saw in the moonlight, for the first time, what you, poor thing, have come to look like; and that the child was as yellow as wax. My heart choked me for terror and pity—I nearly burst out crying, and I left the room half-dead. I knocked at the baker's and bought a loaf, stole back into the house and left it with you, and stood and looked at you a little while longer, and it was all I could do to drag myself away. What more am I to tell you? A man can go through the suffering of a hundred years in one minute.

Hannah Krön,<sup>1</sup> I know that I am a bandit, a murderer, not to have got you a divorce, or at all events a conditional divorce—but God in heaven is my witness: I hadn't the heart! I felt that if I left you a divorce, I should die of grief on the way. We are a true and faithful couple. God Himself was present at our union, and I am bound to you with my whole heart, we are one soul in two bodies, and I do not know how I shall live without you and without the child, may it be well, even for a minute. And should anyone say I have left you a grass-widow, don't believe it; for I, Shmùel Mösheh, am your husband, and I have only done what I *had* to do. What will misery not drive a man to? Hannah'li Krön, if I could lay my heart open before you, you would see what is going on there, and I should feel a little happier. As it is, dear soul, I am very wretched, the tears are pouring from my eyes so that I cannot see what I am writing, and my heart aches and my brain goes round like a mill-

<sup>1</sup> Hannah my crown.

wheel—and my teeth chatter, and the letter-carrier, the illiterate boor, stands over me and bangs on the table and cries: “I must go! I must go!”

Lord of the world, have pity on me now and on my wife Hannah, health to her, and on the child, so that I may have joy of it yet.

From me, your dear husband, who writes in the inn on the way,

SHMUEL MÖSHEH.

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SECOND LETTER

My precious and beloved wife:

What am I to say to you? I see clearly that my idea of going away was heaven-sent, that God Himself put the thought of America into my head; everything He does is for the best.

My dear Hannah, whenever I shut my eyes I fancy myself at home again, and the dream comes from the other end of the world. For who would have thought that an idler like me, such a nincompoop as I am, such a born fool, should ride on a railway, cross the sea in a ship, and arrive safe in America? The finger of God! “I will praise the Lord”—it was God’s disposing—His will alone enabled me to leave you and the child, and may we be counted worthy to rear it for the Torah, the marriage canopy, and all good works.

Hannah’li Krön, I have seen great wonders on dry land, but nothing to what I saw on the sea. While I was at sea, I forgot everything I had seen on dry land, and now, among the wonders of America, I begin to forget about the sea.

At first I was so miserable on board ship, there are no words for it. But all ended well, and I am sure it was for your sake and the child's.

Hannah'li, I am sure you remember Leeb the reader,<sup>1</sup> who came to our town once a few years ago, and recited the prayers in our Shool during the Solemn Days. I remember that after the Day of Atonement you told me you had never heard such davenen<sup>2</sup> in your life. I even recall the very words you used: Leeb the reader "roars like a lion and weeps like a child."

Next morning there was something of a commotion in the town; people had forgotten Leeb the reader, hadn't paid him properly, and he, poor man, went from house to house collecting money—with a little girl, you remember, whose name was Genendil. She accompanied her father's singing with her childish voice. When they came to our house, you were very sorry for her, took her into your lap, kissed her on the head, and gave her something, I forget what. And you cried for compassion over the motherless child. Perhaps you wonder at my remembering all this?

You see, Hannah'li Krön, I remember all the kind things you said and all your actions, for they were full of charm. You are continually before me. I fancied sometimes, crossing the sea, that you stood beside me, and that the child had hold of your apron, and I heard your voices, and they sounded in my ears with a sweetness beyond all description.

<sup>1</sup>Chazan, the reader or reciter of the prayers in the synagogue.

<sup>2</sup>Reciting of prescribed prayers.

And I have come across Leeb the reader, by the way. Heaven forgive me, but Leeb the reader has sunk very low.

He paid no attention on board ship as to whether the food were kosher or not, and he drinks as is not the way with Jews. I never once saw him in prayer-scarf and phylacteries the whole time, or saying grace after meat. He goes about all day without a hat—and not content with this, he leads his daughter into the same paths. The Genendil of those days is now about seventeen. You should see her—a picture! And he made her sing and dance before the passengers on board ship—and she sings in different languages. The people listened and clapped their hands with delight and cried out goodness knows what. And it was all so boisterous that really— . . .

At first—why deny it?—I was very pleased to see them. It's always somebody from home, I thought. I won't have to hang about so lonely and wretched. But afterward I felt greatly distressed. I couldn't bear to watch his goings-on with his daughter. And now and again it cut me to the heart to hear a Jew, who used to stand at the reading-desk, a messenger of Israel to the Almighty, talk such disgusting nonsense. And his voice is burned with brandy.

And they must take me in hand and try to make me presentable. They made fun of me on board. It was always: "Idler!" "Fool!" He tweaked my earlocks; she pulled the fringe off my "little prayer-scarf," and the whole ship took it up.

And what ailed them at me? That I avoided forbidden food and preferred to fast rather than touch it.

You know, I dislike quarrelling, so I edged away, hid in a corner, and wept my heart out in secret.

But they discovered me and made a laughing-stock of me, and I thought it would be my death.

It is only here, in America, that I see it was all a god-send; that God, in His great goodness, had sent Leeb the reader before me into America, as He sent Joseph before his brothers into Egypt.

Because, what should I have done without them? A man without the language of the country, without a trade, not knowing at which door to knock? And Leeb the reader is quite at home here, talks English fluently, and he got me straight away into a cigar-factory, and I am at work and earning something already.

Meanwhile we are in the same lodging, because how should I set about finding one for myself?

And they behave quite differently to me now. Genendil has given over quizzing me about my beard and earlocks, and keeps at a distance, as beseems a Jewish daughter. She cooks for us, and that is very important, although I eat no meat, only eggs, and I drink tea without milk.<sup>1</sup> She washes for us, too.

There is a lesson to be learned from this, namely, that what the Lord does is for the best.

And do you know *why* it has all turned out for the best? For *your* sake!

On the boat, already, when I began to feel I could bear it no longer, I plucked up my courage and went to

<sup>1</sup> Lest the meat and milk should not be ritually permitted.

Genendil and told her I was your husband. I recalled to her memory the time after the Day of Atonement when they were in our house, how good you were to her, how you took her on your knee, and so on.

Her manner changed at once, she had compassion on me, and her eyes filled with tears. Then she ran to her father, and talked it over with him, and we made peace.

They immediately asked the captain to treat me better, and he agreed to do so.

I was given bread as much as I could eat, and tea as much as I could drink. The crew stopped tormenting me, and I began to breathe again.

You should have seen what a favorite Genendil was on board. And no wonder: first, she is a great beauty, and for a beauty people will jump into the sea; secondly, she is really good-natured, and people are simply charmed by her.

And now, my precious wife, I will give you some good news:

Leeb the reader tells me I shall earn at least ten dollars a week.

I reckon to do as follows: the half, five dollars, I will send to you, and keep five for myself. I will live on this and save up to buy a Talmud. The Mishnah books I brought with me. I have settled to read at least ten pages of the Gemoreh a week. I won't buy a prayer-scarf, because so far I have prayed in Leeb the reader's—for Leeb the reader had one with him.

To what end, I don't know, because, as to praying—never a word!

I persuade myself, this is also heaven-sent; he was made to bring a prayer-scarf on my account.

Perhaps he means to pray at the reading-desk during the Solemn Days. Who knows? They are drawing near. Anything is possible in America. The world here is topsy-turvy. And the Lord knows best what is good for a man.

Do you know what? I am not angry with your brother, the bandit, any longer. It's the same thing again: I tell you, that also was a godsend; it couldn't otherwise be possible that a man should treat his sister so.

That was all brought about in order that I should run away to America, and send for you to come to me. And when, God helping, I have made some money, I will assist your brother, too. I tell you, he also is a pauper. I see now—what *we* call a rich man is a beggar in America.

I end my letter, and this time briefly, although I have heaps and heaps more to say, because I am afraid Leeb the reader and Genendil may come in, and I don't want them to see what I have written to you. And I beg of you very much not to show my letters to a living soul. Why need a stranger know of our doings? And I hug and kiss the child, long life to it. Give it ten thousand loving kisses from me—do you hear?

From me, your husband

SHMUEL MÖSHEH.

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### THIRD LETTER

My beloved wife:

I can remember when Yoneh the shoemaker went to

America, and people began to talk about it for the first time, wondering what it was like there, how things were done.

They asked, whether people walked on their heads, and it is true that everything here is upside down. No sort of order, only a great shouting and noise, as in the butchers' meeting-house at home.

Imagine, for instance, Paltiel the wadding-maker and Yössil the tanner coming and saying that our rabbi is not learned; that he is not experienced enough in the application of the Law, or that they are not satisfied with the head of the community—that they want another rabbi, another communal head. Well, wouldn't one hold one's sides laughing?

And here, in America, workmen, cigar-cutters, for instance like me, have a word to say in everything. They share in the elections, take part in the voting, and choose—a President.

And what do you think that is? A President is nothing more nor less than the supreme head of the whole country. And America, so I have heard, is ten times as large as the whole of Europe. You see what that means? Now imagine my surprise, as I sit in my room one evening, thinking of home, and suddenly the door opens, and there come in two workmen, ordinary workmen, who stand with me at the same machine, and are *Achènu Benè Yisroèl*.<sup>1</sup> And they laid two names before me, I don't even recollect what they were, and tell me, I also am a workman, and must see to the election of a President who shall favor our class.

<sup>1</sup> Our brothers, the children of Israel.

And they told me that *one* President was all for the rich people and trod down all those who lived by their ten fingers; while the second, the one they wanted to have elected, was a jewel; he stood for the workingman like a flint, and pursued the bloated upper classes with a fierce hatred. And more such foolishness, which I did not understand.

Inwardly I laughed at them. But for the sake of peace—it is not seemly to be rude to people—I did them the favor and nodded yes.

All I wanted was to get rid of them, so as to sit down and write to you.

But— isn't it a madness?

They say, if the President is elected according to their wish, I shall earn ten dollars a week, and if not, only nine or perhaps eight.

And Leeb the reader says he understands politics—that there is sense in it all—and that if I remain here some time, I shall get to know something about it, too. Well, perhaps so—I nod my head. And I think to myself, he has taken a drop too much and is talking nonsense. But he swore that during election-time he lived on it, and had a little money over for later. I'm sure I don't see how.

But, joking apart, it's not our affair whether one or the other is President; it won't make much difference to us.

The fact is, I often feel very depressed, the tears fall from my eyes on the tobacco leaves that I am cutting, and I don't sleep well at night. Sometimes there is a noise in my ears, and my head aches whole days together

—and there is no better remedy for all this than to take paper, pen, and ink, and write a letter to my dear Hannah.

My precious wife, I cannot keep anything from you. I have to tell you everything: I am still reading the Mishnah—I have got no Talmud yet. And do you know why? Because I have had to make another outlay.

You know that it is everywhere the same world. Although here they cry without stopping, “Liberty! liberty!” it isn’t worth an onion. Here, too, they dislike Jews. They are, if possible, more contemptuous of their appearance. There are no dogs that bark at them in the street and tear their skirts, but there are plenty of hooligans here also. As soon as they catch sight of a “capote”<sup>1</sup> there is a cry: “Jew, Jew!” which is the same as *Zhidd*<sup>2</sup> with us. And they throw stones and mud—there is no lack of mud here, either. So what could I do? I did what all the Jews do here—I tucked away my ear-locks behind my ears, and I bought (to be paid for by degrees—a custom they have) “German” clothes. There was an end to the money. And you, too, Hannah’li, when you come, will have to dress differently, for a custom stultifies a law—and it is their custom.

And as to your writing that you don’t like Genendil, I cannot see why. What ails you at her? It is not for me to set other people right. Besides, I am sure she only does it all for Parnosseh. She is as modest by nature

<sup>1</sup> Kind of cloak.

<sup>2</sup> Russian term of contempt, in contradistinction to *Yevrei* = Hebrew.

as any other Jewish daughter. All day long, while Leeb the reader and I are at the factory, she cooks and washes and sweeps out the rooms. It is only in the evening that she goes with her father to *their* places of amusement, where she sings and plays and dances before the public. I sit by myself at home, read Torah, and write to you. Towards midnight they come home, we drink tea together, and we go to bed.

And as to your saying, you think Genendil stole the spoon which was afterwards missing—that is nonsense!

Genendil may not be very pious as regards the faith, but she would never think of touching other people's property. For goodness' sake, don't ever let her hear of it. She treats me like her own child, and is always asking me if I don't need a clean shirt or a glass of tea.

She is really and truly a good girl. She gives all her earnings to her father, and treats him in a way he doesn't deserve, although at times he comes home very cheerful and talks nineteen to the dozen.

And Leeb the reader has told me that he is collecting a dowry for her, and that, as soon as he has the first thousand dollars, he will find her a bridegroom and marry her according to the law of Moses and of Israel, and she will not have to strain her throat for the public any more. I don't know if he really means it—but I hope so. God grant he may succeed and rid her of the ugly Parnosseh.

Genendil was there when he said this and blushed for shame, as a Jewish girl should do; so she is evidently agreed.

I implore you, dearest Hannah, to put away calumny and evil-speaking. That is not right, it only does for

gossips in a small town. And you, Hannah dear, must come to America. Here the women are different—less flighty, more serious, and as occupied as the men.

To return to the subject, your Shmùel Mösheh is no tailor or shoemaker, to throw over his wife for another woman. You mustn't imagine such a thing! It is an insult! You know that your words pierce my heart like knives, and if Leeb the reader and his daughter knew of it, they would forsake me, and I should be left alone in a desert! It would be a calamity, for I don't know the language, only a few words, and I should be quite helpless.

And now I beg of you, my dear Hannah, I beg very much, take the child's hand and guide it across the paper, so that it may write me something—let me see at least a mark or two it has made! Lord of the world, how often I get away into a corner and have a good cry! And why? Because I was not found worthy to teach my child the Law! And as if I were not suffering enough, there come your letters and strew salt on my wounds. Look here, to-day Leeb the reader asked me, and Genendil, too (here she is called Sophie), nodded her head, to go with them and hear her sing and see her dance, and I wouldn't. Leeb the reader said, "Foolish Chossid!" *She* turned up her nose. But I don't care! I shall go my own ways and not a hair's breadth will I turn aside!

Keep well, you and our child. Such is the wish of your husband

SHMÙEL MÖSHEH.

Please don't let on about the clothes! Not a soul in our town must know of it, or I would be ashamed to lift my eyes.

S. M.

## FOURTH LETTER

To my worthy wife Mistress Hannah:

I have written ten letters without mentioning Genendil's name. I have not even mentioned her father, Leeb the reader. After a great deal of trouble, I have gone into another lodging, at a Shochet's, and haven't seen her for weeks, and yet you go on writing nothing but Genendil and Genendil, and Sophie and Sophie! And what is it you want of her? What? May I be well, and may you be well, and may it be granted us to meet again in peace, with the child, as surely as I saw Sophie come into the factory to see her father—and the director himself went up to her and began to talk to her and to pay her compliments; and although I did not understand what he said, I know he meant no good by it. And he wanted to stroke her cheek. Well, what do you think? She gave him such a slap across the hand that I was dumbfounded! And you should have seen the way she turned away from him and went out! I was just delighted.

So you see that, in spite of everything, Genendil is a good girl, and that you are unjust to her. You tell me I shall be caught like a fish in a net and such-like rubbish. I swear to you, as it were by the Torah on the Day of Atonement, that it is a lie; that for your sake I have gone away from her and avoid her as far as possible. If we do meet, I answer a hundred words with a nod. Once more: Upon my faith, you are unjust to her! Heaven forbid, you sin before God! But that is nothing, I would have passed it over as usual, only it has led

to something so dreadful, that, God help us! I would rather the earth had swallowed me up than that I had lived to endure the shame.

Last week I was taken poorly while at work; I grew giddy and fainted. When I came to myself, I was in bed in my own room. Beside the bed stood a doctor. He said it was a fever. I was laid up for ten days. And Leeb the reader never left me the whole time, and nursed me as if I had been his own child. Afterward, when I had recovered full consciousness, I learnt that while I lay in the fever, Sophie used to come in, too, and visit me—and it was just then there came one of your post-cards in which you pour out upon her the bitterness of your heart—they most certainly read it, because I was lying in a fever.

And while you were writing your ugly words and calumnies, they, so to say, were risking their lives for me—they sent for doctors, made up my bed and re-made it, gave me medicine, and even pawned a few of their treasures, so that help should be there. They even brought me a bottle of wine. I never touched a drop, upon my word! but they meant it well. Besides that they measured the height of the fever three times a day with a little glass tube—the doctors here order it to be done. And who told me all this? The butcher and his wife. Had it not been for Leeb the reader and Sophie, you would be a widow. And at the very same time, you write such foolish things. *Phê*, it is a shame! I really don't know how you are to come to America, how you are to live in America! I hope, dear Hannah'li, that you will throw off this foolishness, and not darken my life with any more such letters.

I often don't sleep at night. I imagine I see you plainly sitting at the table writing to me. You write and scratch out, and write and scratch out, and I see the letter, but I cannot read the words at the distance, and it grieves me very much that I cannot read the letter so far off. And you take the pen and put it into the child's hand—the child is in your lap—and guide its fingers!

And you see, my dear wife, that I send you five dollars every week, that I manage with very little. And I have only three shirts altogether. I cannot ask Sophie to buy me any, and the Shochet's wife has given birth to a baby, and is not yet about again. The circumcision, please God, will be to-morrow. Yes—but that is not to the point. What I mean is, be reasonable, for your own sake, and for the sake of me, your husband

SHMUEL MÖSHEH.

A postscript, written sideways down the whole length of the letter:

I have this minute received another letter from you. And now, my Hannah'li, I tell you once and for all, it is enough to make one's hair stand on end, and hardly to be believed! You write that you may as well let your hair grow and talk with gentlemen, that you also can dance and sing—and that you will go to the Rebbe's and get him to send a "special death" to both of us.

What do you mean? What words are these?

Lord of the world, what has come to you?

I think and think, till I don't know *what* to think! This is my advice: Put away your evil-speaking and cal-

umnies and curses! They are not for such as you! And I tell you simply this, that if you do not soon write the letter a good Jewess ought to write, I shall send and fetch the child away without you—do you hear? Otherwise—I shall throw myself into the sea. It is enough, heaven forbid, to drive one mad!

Your husband  
S. M.

### 3

Two letters which Hannah received from her relative in Lublin, and one from her brother.

#### FIRST LETTER

To my friend, the excellent lady and esteemed and worthy woman, Mistress Hannah:

Dear Hannah, you were a whole fool and half a prophet, when you wrote me a second letter. Because the first one fell into the hands of my husband, and he put it into his pocket and forgot to give it me. Such is his little way—he cares for nothing except eating and drinking. But when I got the second letter, it occurred to me to look in his pocket, and whoso seeks, finds.

Hannah'li Krön, I felt, reading your bitter words, as if I were being struck on the head with an axe. I was stunned with grief. But I soon composed myself and thought, for instance: If my scatterbrain of a husband ran away to America—well? I should just let him run, and pay the piper into the bargain!

Now think: my whole Parnosseh, as you know, is

tar,<sup>1</sup> and I don't require *his* assistance! Indeed, I can't stand his coming into the shop, with the airs he gives himself!

If the customer is a woman, he won't answer her, the Chossid! Won't take the money from her hand, and if it's a man, likely as not he asks too little! If he takes the money, they palm off false coins on him. And if he is so kind, once in a while, as to take up a piece of chalk, and make out a bill for me, it *is* a bill! May they add up my sins, in the other world, as he adds up my wares!

And as to your husband not having left you a divorce, I am not so very surprised; my husband has no such easy time of it, and yet he doesn't divorce me, and why should he? Does he want for anything? He has a nice lodging, and when he comes home, supper is ready and the bed made at the proper time, and every Sabbath he gets a clean white shirt! Many's the time I've begged and prayed of him to go to all devils—not he! Do you think he'd budge an inch? And when I scold him and throw things at his head, he gets into a corner, makes a pitiful face, brings crocodile tears into his eyes, and I am so foolish as to relent, I give him food and drink, and off he goes.

And as to what you say about your lawsuit, you know, sister Hannah, I have quite a celebrated lawyer, because, for my sins, I have a never-ending case against cooks, the hussies! I assure you, Hannah'li, servants such as we have in Lublin are not to be found anywhere! How shall I describe them? Always swilling and stuffing—

<sup>1</sup> This was an important article of trade, required for the peasants' carts, etc.

and they steal anything they can lay hands on, and run away before the quarter is out; and then they lodge a complaint against me, because I haven't paid them a quarter's wages, and in court, nowadays, they don't make a particle of difference between a servant-girl and a mistress, and I have to stand with her side by side! I mayn't open my mouth to say a word, otherwise the judge rings a bell and imposes a fine up to three rubles. So I never go into court alone, but have engaged an excellent lawyer, whose mouth drops sulphur and pitch, and he sees me through.

He once told me himself that the judge had frequently wished to imprison me on some ridiculous pretext, such as tearing a girl's hair or giving her a slap! But he cannot do it, because my advocate has all the law-books in his head, knows all the laws, every single one, chooses out the best for me, and flings them in the judge's face, so that he sits there like a dummy and, willy-nilly, has to write "Acquitted!"

And no sooner had I read your letter, and found the first one in my husband's pocket, than I hastened to my lawyer, and he received me most politely, and asked me to be seated on the plush sofa.

I told him your whole story from Aleph to Taw, down to every detail; and he listened attentively to it all, although the anteroom was crowded with people waiting. He listened and walked up and down the room.

Then he sighed and said that according to the laws a daughter had equal rights with a son and should inherit a share! So far, good! But there is the following hitch: A wife cannot summons anyone without her

husband's knowledge, because she is under his jurisdiction, and must be given power of attorney by him.

And when I told him that you, unhappily, were a grass-widow, that your husband had deserted you, and that, in my opinion, you were free to do as you pleased, he planted himself in front of me and shook his head—that meant: By no means!

And he went to a book-case, took out one book after the other, looked in, put it down, looked in and put it down, and so on with any number of books, little and big and bigger. One, heaven forgive me, was as fat as a pig. And in this one he apparently found what he was in search of, for he stood over it a long time.

And then he told me, that if, after five years from the date of your desertion, you bring him a paper from the justice of your town to certify that your husband has not once shown himself in those five years, he, the lawyer, will put in a plea for you in court, and the court will give you permission to summons your brother.

This is what he said—I give it you word for word.

I offered him a ruble, and he made a wry face—evidently, not enough; but he took it. Send me the ruble, Hannah'li Krön, as soon as you can, for trade is slack, and tar is a drug in the market.

To return to the matter in hand:

It is what I always said and I say it again: the holy Torah (and *their* law, lehavdîl, of course, also) has handed us over to the mercy of bandits! A man, a dummy, a bolster, can divorce his wife when he likes, either in person or by proxy; and a worthy woman, like myself, for instance, cannot get rid of an idler like mine for love or money!

If we go together to a family gathering, *he* is stuffed with fish and meat and all good things, and I—get a cup of chicory and milk!

When he sits in the booth at Tabernacles, one has to send him the best of everything, and I live on bones!

I share the three weeks, nine days, and all the fasts, but the Rejoicing of the Law is *his*!

He goes to a Rebbe, and they give him honey with apples! And what will Paradise, when it comes to that, mean for *me*? I shall be the idiot's footstool! He will sit in a grandfather's chair, and I shall be his footstool!

In this world he is a feeble creature and is afraid of me, but how it will be in the other world, don't ask me! I tell you plainly, if he gives me the least shove with his foot, the Almighty alone knows what will happen!

To return: What would you get by a divorce? Believe me, all dogs have the same face! Not one of them is worth a dreier! You know my sister Miriam suffered through her husband ten years before she could obtain a divorce, and then she had to leave him her money and her clothes—in a word, all she had! A nice thing, wasn't it?

She married again and was out of the frying-pan into the fire: another idler to feed! She wanted a second divorce, he was satisfied, but she couldn't afford to pay for it!

In short, dear Hannah, our mother Eve sinned and we suffer for it! And we always shall suffer! For there is no escape from a husband, even in the grave.

We have been sold to be servants and slaves in the other world, too! So it was aforetime, so it is now, and so it will be in the future world! One has to suffer! For what is to be done, if the Almighty wills it so?

Therefore, dear Hannah, have faith in God, blessed is He! Keep well and forget your husband, who has probably forgotten you. That is always the way when they go to America.

At first they write honeyed letters and send money; then, less and less; then they write and send money once a year—then, once in seven years—they don't need their wives out there, they have other women, better, livelier!

May I be forgiven for saying so, but in Lublin, in the Jewish quarter, there isn't a house without a grass-widow! Wash your hands of him, I tell you, and forget! Imagine yourself a real widow or a divorced woman! Turn your attention to the onions. May His blessed Name send you success in business and preserve you whichever way you turn. Such is the wish of your relative.

(The signature is undecipherable.)

I beg of you to send me the ruble as soon as possible, because my husband, gorgier and tippler than he is, is angry with me for having given it.

(The same undecipherable signature.)

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#### SECOND LETTER

To my sister Hannah:

First, my dear sister, I let you know that we are all well, except my wife, Eva Gütel, who (not of you be it

said!) is never free from cough for an instant, and who, no sooner is the wedding over, must go to Warsaw to consult a doctor.

I send you enclosed an invitation to the wedding. Mind you come and enjoy yourself! Only do not, for mercy's sake, spoil my daughter's happiness, and keep all contentions till the wedding is over.

You need not feel called upon to bring any present. If, however, you are troubled about appearances, you are sure to find something in the house that will do. I shall not take it amiss. Blood is thicker than water and a sister is a sister.

And as to what you say about having no clothes to come in, that is nonsense. You can borrow a dress of some one or other either there or here.

And as to what you say about not being able to comfort yourself for the child that has died—you know, dear sister, "He gave and He hath taken away!"

Children are a pledge from God, and if God wishes to take back the deposit, we must not even brood over it and try to think why. God forbid!

And as to your being afraid of your husband finding out that the child is dead and breaking with you altogether, that is another useless anticipation. Believe me, sister, it is quite foolish, because if it is true, as people say, that Shmùel Mösheh is Shmùel Mösheh no longer—he is treading other paths—it will be all the same, child or no child. He doesn't want you and you cannot hold to him!

And if, as I trust, that is all an invention, a calumny, and if, as I firmly believe, Shmùel Mösheh is still Shmùel

Mösheh, the learned and pious Jew, then you have nothing to fear! On the contrary, with half the expense it will be much easier to have you out to join him, and you will live in peace and plenty.

And as to your having had no news of him for so long, is it a wonder? I believe it is across the sea! How many ships, preserve us, are wrecked on the way; how many postmen lose their lives on such an errand! And perhaps the ships have to pass the spot where, as the Book of the Covenant says, the waters stand on an heap, and there is peril of death. Thank His dear Name that your Shmùel Mösheh crossed in safety! I consider this fleeing to lands beyond the sea a disgrace and a shame, it is a sign of want of trust, because he who trusts knows that God helps whom He will, and he shrinks from endangering both body and soul. For they say that America is as dangerous to the soul as the sea to the body. They say, people throw off their Jewishness on board ship as soon as the sea gives them a toss. They soon begin to eat bread baked by Gentiles, forbidden food, to dress German fashion, women wear wigs, even, it has been said, their own hair. And the proof that America is dangerous to the soul is that there is not one "good Jew" in all America! And I cannot imagine how one would exist there, where one could get advice in questions of Parnosseh, or if one were ill, or anything else happened to one. I tell you that the man who goes into Satan's domain of his own accord is responsible for his soul, for he is like a foolish bird flying into a net. And particularly a learned Jew, because the greater the man, the greater the danger, the more is the Evil One set on

his destruction, and decoys him with either riches or beautiful women; the Evil One has tools for the work at hand.

And, therefore, my advice to you is, so long as you do not know what is happening there, forget! If you earn your livelihood with the onions, well and good, and if, heaven forbid, you cannot, I can give you other advice. If you come to the wedding, I will make it all right between you and my wife. We are, after all, one family, and you know that my wife, Eva Gütel, is really very good-natured; she is sure to forgive you, and when all is smooth again and she goes to Warsaw, after the wedding, then you will remain here and be house-mistress. And when, please God, she comes back cured, she will still find a place for you at the table and a bed in the house. Times are bad, but a sister is a sister, and one cuts the herring into thinner slices.

But beside all that we have a mighty God—shall He not be able to feed one of His creatures?—and that a woman!

Nonsense!

And, for goodness' sake, come to the wedding in time, so that you may be able to lend Eva Gütel a hand. It is no more than one has a right to ask a sister-in-law. You would not wish, as things are nowadays, to have us hire extra help? Only, be sure and let everything I have said to you about the future remain between ourselves. Eva Gütel is not to know what I have written to you. The thing ought to come of itself, quite of itself. You know, Eva Gütel does not like one to interfere in domestic concerns—and I am sure, the thing *will* arrange

itself. A woman is a woman even if she wears a top-hat.

That is why I write to you when Eva Gütel is not at home. She has gone to engage the Badchan<sup>1</sup> and the musician; I shall not even tell her I sent you an invitation: let her imagine you were so good and so right-thinking as to come of your own accord! And may He whose Name is blessed comfort you together with all that mourn in Israel, and spread the wings of His compassion over all abandoned women. Amen, may it seem good in His sight.

Sister Hannah, whether you stay where you are or remain with us for good, come to the wedding! You simply *must*! And you shall not repent it! It will be a fine wedding! It may be that he himself, may his days and years increase, will be present. It will cost me a fortune, but it is worth it! You see that such a wedding is not to be missed?

From me, your brother

MENACHEM MENDIL.

My wife Eva Gütel has just come in from market and—a token that heaven wills it so—she tells me that I am not to hide my letter from her, that she bears you no grudge. She advises you to sell the onions, buy a dress, and come to the wedding looking like other people, as befits the bride's aunt.

She also says that no present is necessary, and that one can trade in onions here, too.

<sup>1</sup> Wedding jester and improvisatore.

<sup>2</sup> The Rebbe.

I repeat that my wife Eva Gütel is both kind-hearted and wise, and that, if you will only not be obstinate, everything will come right.

You will see!

Your brother

M. M.

4

An unfinished letter from Hannah to her husband.

Good luck to you, my dear, faithful husband, good luck to you!

Here's good news from us, and may I ever hear the like from you. Amen, may it be His will! We are, indeed, as you say, united for all time, in *this* world and the other!

I let you know, first, dear husband, that my brother Menachem Mendil and his wife Eva Gütel (may they live to see the days of the Messiah!) forgave me everything, and sent for me in a lucky hour to their daughter's wedding—Beile-Sasha's wedding.

It was a very fine one, fine as fine can be! Praise God that I was found worthy to see it! There was every kind of meat, birds and beef; and fish—just fish, and stuffed fish—and all sorts of other dishes, beside wine and brandy—something of everything.

And the whole thing was such a success—so elegant! And I myself cooked the meat, stuffed the fish, made the stew, sent up the dinner, and also saw to the marketing beforehand.

I was house-mistress! I was waitress! I did not go merely to enjoy myself!

I sold my stock of onions, made myself a dress of sorts, and went to my relations, agreeably to their wish, a whole week before the wedding; because there was no one to do the work; the bride was taken up with her clothes, she spent the time with the tailor, the shoemaker, and even the jeweller up to the very last minute.

And poor Eva Gütel, my sister-in-law, has a cough. And they say her liver is not what it should be.

So I was everybody—*before* the wedding and *after* the wedding, only not *at* the wedding, during which I felt very tired and done up. I sat in a corner and cried for joy, because I had been counted worthy to marry my brother's child, and—because she had such an elegant wedding! And I was not turned out in a hurry when it was over, either.

Directly after it, my sister-in-law, health and strength to her, started to consult a doctor in Lublin as to which doctor she ought to see in Warsaw.

Then she left for Warsaw and went the round of all the celebrated doctors. Thence she travelled to some other place to drink the waters—mineral waters they are called—and during the whole six months of her absence, I was mistress of the house.

May the Almighty remember it to them for good and reward them!

There was no cook—I did the cooking. And I drank delight out of it as from a well!

In the first place, I had no time for thinking and brooding, and was thereby saved from going mad, or even melancholy! And where, indeed, should I have found it?

Business, thank heaven, was brisk. The public-house is always full and the counter strewn with the gold and silver of Jews and Gentiles, lehavdil.

And my sister-in-law Eva Gütel's stuffed fish are celebrated for miles round, and there the people sit and eat and drink.

And if ever I *began* to think, and *wanted* to think, Beile-Sasha, long life to her, soon reminded me of where I was! And she has sharp eyes, bless her, nothing escapes them!

And so it went merrily on—and I was so overjoyed at being house-mistress there that once I spat blood—but only once.

Menachem Mendil saw it, and he told me to be sure and behave as if nothing had happened, because, if people knew of it, they would avoid his house. Yössil the inn-keeper over the way would soon cry: Consumption! and there would be an end of it, and grass growing down our side of the street.

But Beile-Sasha is the cleverer of the two, she soon discovered that it was not consumption, but that I had swallowed a fish-bone, and it scratched my throat, and so, that I should not suffocate, she gave me a blow between the shoulders to loosen it, and, all for love's sake, *such* a blow that the fish-bone went down—only *my* bones ached a bit.

But all's well that ends well—and Eva Gütel has come back from drinking the waters!

She has come back, thank God, in the best of health and spirits—a sight for sore eyes!—and she has brought presents, the most beautiful presents, for herself, for her

husband, for her daughter and her son-in-law—lovely things! But there was nothing for me; she said that I, heaven forbid, was no servant to be given presents and wages. Had I not been house-mistress?

Had not Eva Gütel herself told me fifty times that I was mistress, and could do as I liked?

And no sooner was Eva Gütel back, than she discovered that Menachem Mendil had not been near the Rebbe the whole time, and she wrung her fingers till the bones cracked, and immediately sent me out to the market-place to hire a conveyance.

Menachem Mendil drove to the holy man that same day.

And next morning, Eva Gütel gave me some good advice, which was to make up my bundle and go—because she was there again and had Beile-Sasha to help her. I should be fifth wheel to the cart and might go mad from having nothing to do. She advised me to go back whence I came or to stay in the place and do as I thought best. She would not be responsible, either way.

I had slept my last night in her house.

The next one I spent walking the streets with my bundle under my arm.

You see, my dear husband, that I am doing very well. You need send me no more money, as you used to do. You had better give it to Leeb the reader to buy you a Talmud, or to Genendil-Sophie to buy you some shirts. And mind she tries them on you herself, to see how they fit—is it not America?

You see, my dear, good husband, I harbor no more unjust suspicions. I never say now that Genendil stole

either the spoon or my husband. I know it is not her fault, and I am convinced that His blessed Name only meant to do us a kindness when He brought you and Leeb the reader together on the ship, so that he should take care of you—it is all just as you wrote. There is only one thing that will never be as you think. You may jump out of your skin, but you will never send for the child, to take it away from me to America. Because our child, for your sake and for that of your pious forefathers, has been gone this long time; it has been hidden somewhere in the burial ground, in a little room without a door, without a window. You may cry to heaven, but you shall not know where its little bones lie! No tombstone, nothing to mark it—nothing at all! Go, look for the wind in the fields!

Askerah<sup>1</sup> has taken it under her wing.

And since you have such a wonderful memory, and remember everything I said and everything I did, I will tell you a story which you may recollect. It is a story about a shawl I did not know what to do with. Should I put it on and run for the doctor for the child, or stop up the broken pane with it to keep the snow from blowing in, or wrap it round the child, because the poor thing was suffocating with its throat? And it was cold, bitterly cold. I ran to and fro several times, from the window to the cradle, to the door, and back from the door to the window—I tell you, I ran! I think, my dear husband, you will not forget that moment, because, as you say, we are bound one to the other, you to me and both of us to the child, and now the child is not there, we two may as well

<sup>1</sup> Croup.

go, too. Well, what will Genendil say? To tell the truth, I have decided to let my hair grow and dress as they dress in America, and do you know that, beside this, I have a sweet voice and can chant all the prayers, and now, since I have been at my brother Menachem Mendil's, I have heard drunken peasants sing all sorts of songs—and I have learned them and I sing every whit as well as Genendil, if not better; and at night, when I slept under the open sky, the Queen of Sheba came and taught me to dance—and a whole night long I danced with the Queen of Sheba in the eye of the moon.

And you, my dear Shmùel Mösheh, have made a bad bargain, for I am better than Genendil. Because I remember quite well that she had two moles, one on the left ear and one on the right cheek—and rather a crooked nose. And I, you know, have a perfectly clear skin, without a mole anywhere. You thought that only Genendil could sing and dance every Friday night, and let her hair grow, that other people were not up to that! But I am not angry with you, heaven forbid! Hold to her! It is enough for me to have the child's grave. I shall go and build myself a little house there, and sit in it through the night till the cock crows. I shall talk to the child, very low and softly, about his father Shmùel Mösheh, and that will delight him! And if you come yourself, or send anyone, to fetch the child, I shall scratch out his eyes with my nails, because the child is mine, not Genendil's—may her name and her remembrance perish, and may you and she . . . . .

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The letter is unfinished; it was found together with the other letters in the pocket of the mad Hannah.

XXI

IN THE POND



## XXI

### IN THE POND

Once upon a time there was a pond. It had a corner to itself, and lay quite apart from the rest of the field where beasts were wont to graze and herd-boys to fling stones.

A high bank, set with briars, screened it from the wind, and it had a slimy, shiny green covering, in which the breeze tore a hole once in twelve months. In the pond there dwelt (according to the order of nature) a colony of quite small worms which fed on still smaller ones.

The pond was neither long nor wide, not even deep, and if the little worms could neither discover a bottom nor swim to shore, they had only the thick slime and the water-weeds and the fallen twigs to thank for it.

The geography of the pond was in its infancy.

Conceit, on the other hand, flourished, and fancy had it all her own way beneath the green covering—and the two together sat spinning and weaving.

And they wove between them a legend of the beginning of things, a truly worm-like tradition.

The pond is the great sea, and the four streams of Paradise flow into it. Hiddekel brings gold (that is the slime in which they find their nourishment), and the other three bring flowers (the water-weeds among which they play hide-and-seek on holidays), pearls (frog-

pawn), and corals (the little orange fungi on the rotting twigs).

The green cover, the slimy cap on the surface of the pond, is the heaven stretched out over the ocean, a special heaven for their own particular world. Fragments of egg-shell, which have fallen into it, play the part of stars, and a rotten pumpkin does duty for the sun.

The chance stones flung into the pond by the herd-boys are, of course, hailstones flung by heaven at the head of sinners!

And when their heaven opened, and a few beams of the real sun penetrated to a wormy brain, then they believed in hell!

But life in the pond was a pleasant thing!

People were satisfied with themselves and with one another.

When one lives in the great sea, one is as good as a fish oneself.

One worm would call another "Tench," "Pike;" "Crocodile" and "Leviathan" would be engraved on tombstones.

"Roach" was the greatest insult, and "Haddock" not to be forgiven, even on the Day of Atonement.

Meanwhile, astronomy, poetry, and philosophy blossomed like the rose!

The bits of egg-shell were counted over and over again, till everyone was convinced of the absurdity of the attempt.

Romantic poets harped on the Heavenly Academy in a thousand different keys.

Patriots were likened to the stars, stars to ladies' eyes, and the ladies themselves to Paradise—or else to Purgatory! Philosophy transferred the souls of the pious to the rotten pumpkin.

In short, nothing was wanting!

Life had all the colors of the rainbow. In due time a code of law was framed with hundreds of commentaries, they introduced a thousand rules and regulations, and if a worm had the slightest desire to make a change, he had but to remember what the world would think, blush, regret, and do penance!

Once, however, there was a catastrophe! It was caused by a herd of swine. Dreadful feet crashed through the heaven, stamped down the slime, bruised the corals, made havoc of the flowers, and plunged the entire little "world" back into chaos.

Some of the worms were asleep under the slime (and worms sleep fast and long).

These escaped.

When they rose out of the mud, the heavens had already swum together again and united; but whole heaps of squeezed, squashed, and suffocated worms were lying about unburied, witnesses in death of the past awful event!

"What has happened?" was the cry, and search was made for some living soul who should know the cause of the calamity.

But such a living soul was not easy to find!

It is no light thing to survive a heaven!

Those who were not stamped upon had died of fright, and those who were not killed by fright had died of a broken heart.

The remainder committed suicide. Without a heaven, what is life?

One had survived, but, when he had declared to them that the heaven they now saw was a new heaven, fresh, as it were, from the shop, and that the former heaven had been trodden in of beasts; when he asserted that a worm-heaven is not eternal—that only the universal heaven is, perhaps, eternal—then they saw clearly that his mind had become deranged.

He was assisted with the deepest compassion, and conveyed to an asylum for lunatics.

XXII

THE CHANUKAH LIGHT



## XXII

### THE CHANUKAH LIGHT

My top-coat was already in my hand, and yet I could not decide: to go, or not to go—to give my lesson! O, it is so unpleasant outside, such horrible weather!—a mile's trudge—and then what?

“Once more: pakád, pakádti”<sup>1</sup>—once more: the old house-master, who has got through his sixty and odd years of life without knowing any grammar; who has been ten times to Leipzig, two or three times to Dantzic; who once all but landed in Constantinople—and who cannot understand such waste of money: Grammar, indeed? A fine bargain!

Then the young house-master, who allows that it is far more practical to wear ear-locks, a fur-cap, and a braided kaftan, to consult with a “good Jew,” and not to know any grammar . . . not that he is otherwise than orthodox himself . . . but he is obliged, as a merchant, to mix with men, to wear a hat and a stiff shirt; to permit his wife to visit the theatre; his daughter, to read books; and to engage a tutor for his son . . .

“My father, of course, knows best! But one must move with the times!” He cannot make up his mind to be left in the lurch by the times! “I only beg of you,” he said to me, “don’t make an unbeliever of the boy! I will give you,” he said, “as much as would pay

<sup>1</sup>He visited, I visited. Hebrew.

for a whole lot of grammar, if you will *not* teach him that the earth goes round the sun!"

And I promised that he should never hear it from me, because—because this was my only lesson, and I had a sick mother at home!

To go, or not to go?

The whole family will be present to watch me when I give my lesson.

*She* also?

She sits in the background, always deep in a book; now and again she lifts her long, silken lashes, and a little brightness is diffused through the room; but so seldom, so seldom!

And what is to come of it?

Nothing ever *can* come of it, except heart-ache.

"Listen!" My mother's weak voice from the bed recalls me to myself. "The Feldscher says, if only I had a pair of warm, woollen socks, I might creep about the room a little!"

That, of course, decides it.

Except for the lady of the house, who has gone to the play, as usual without the knowledge of her father-in-law, I find the whole family assembled round the pinchbeck samovar. The young house-master acknowledges my greeting with a negligent "a good year to you!" and goes on turning over in his palm a pack of playing cards. Doubtless he expects company.

The old house-master, in a peaked cap and a voluminous Turkish dressing-gown, does not consider it worth while to remove from his lips the long pipe with its amber mouthpiece, or to lift his eyes from off his well-

worn book of devotions. He merely gives me a nod, and once more sinks his attention in the portion appointed for Chanukah.

*She* also is intent on her reading, only *her* book, as usual, is a novel.

My arrival makes a disagreeable impression on my pupil.

"O, I say!" and he springs up from his seat at the table, and lowers his black-ringed, little head defiantly, "lessons to-day?"

"Why not?" smiles his father.

"But it's Chanukah!" answers the boy, tapping the floor with his foot, and pointing to the first light, which has been placed in the window, behind the curtain, and fastened to a bit of wood.

"Quite right!" growls the old gentleman.

"Well, well," says the younger one, with indifference, "you must excuse him for once!"

I have an idea that *she* has become suddenly paler, that she bends lower over her book.

I wish them all good night, but the young house-master will not let me go.

"You must stay to tea!"

"And to 'rascals with poppy-seed!'" cries my pupil, joyfully. He is quite willing to be friends, so long as there is no question of "pakád, pakádti."

I am diffident as to accepting, but the boy seizes my hand, and, with a roguish smile on his restless features, he places a chair for me opposite to his sister's.

<sup>1</sup> A kind of cake.

Has he observed anything? On *my* side, of course, I mean . . .

*She* is always abstracted and lost in her reading. Very likely she looks upon me as an idler, or even worse. . . she does not know that I have a sick mother at home!

"It will soon be time for you to dress!" exclaims her father, impatiently.

"Soon, very soon, Tatishe!" she answers hastily, and her pale cheeks take a tinge of color.

The young house-master abandons himself once more to his reflections; my pupil sends a top spinning across the table; the old man lays down his book, and stretches out a hand for his tea.

Involuntarily I glance at the Chanukah light opposite to me in the window.

It burns so sadly, so low, as if ashamed in the presence of the great, silvered lamp hanging over the dining-table, and lighting so brilliantly the elegant tea-service.

I feel more depressed than ever, and do not observe that she is offering me a glass of tea.

"With lemon?" her melancholy voice rouses me.

"Perhaps you prefer milk?" says her father.

"Look out! the milk is smoked!" cries my pupil, warningly.

An exclamation escapes her:

"How can you be so . . .!"

Silence once more. Nothing but a sound of sipping and a clink of spoons. Suddenly my pupil is moved to inquire:

"After all, teacher, what is Chanukah?"

"Ask the rabbi to-morrow in school!" says the old man, impatiently.

"Eh!" is the prompt reply, "I should think a tutor knew better than a rabbi!"

The old man casts an angry glance at his son, as if to say: "Do you see?"

"I want to know about Chanukah, too!" she exclaims softly.

"Well, well," says the young house-master to me, "let us hear your version of Chanukah by all means!"

"It happened," I begin, "in the days when the Greeks oppressed us in the land of Israel. The Greeks—" But the old man interrupts me with a sour look:

"In the Benedictions it says: 'The wicked Kingdom of Javan.'"

"It comes to the same thing," observes his son, "what *we* call Javan, *they* call Greeks."

"The Greeks," I resume, "oppressed us terribly! It was our darkest hour. As a nation, we were threatened with extinction. After a few ill-starred risings, the life seemed to be crushed out of us, the last gleam of hope had faded. Although in our own country, we were trodden under foot like worms."

The young house-master has long ceased to pay me any attention. His ear is turned to the door; he is intent on listening for the arrival of a guest.

But the old house-master fixes me with his eye, and, when I have a second time used the word "oppressed," he can no longer contain himself:

"A man should be explicit! 'Oppressed'—what does that convey to me? They forced us to break the Sabbath; they forbade us to keep our festivals, to study the Law, even to practice circumcision."

"You play 'Preference'?" inquires the younger gentleman, suddenly, "or perhaps even poker?"

Once more there is silence, and I continue: "The misfortune was aggravated by the fact that the nobility and the wealthy began to feel ashamed of their own people, and to adopt Greek ways of living. They used to frequent the gymnasiums."

She and the old gentleman look at me in astonishment.<sup>1</sup>

"In the gymnasiums of those days," I hasten to add, "there was no studying—they used to practice gymnastics, naked, men and women together—"

The two pairs of eyes lower their gaze, but the young house-master raises his with a flash.

"What did you say?"

I make no reply, but go on to speak of the theatres where men fought wild beasts and oxen, and of other Greek manners and customs which must have been contrary to Jewish tradition.

"The Greeks thought nothing of all this; they were bent on effacing every trace of independent national existence. They set up an altar in the street with an 'Avodeh zoroh,'<sup>2</sup> and commanded us to sacrifice to it."

"What is that?" she asks in Polish.

I explain; and the old man adds excitedly:

"And a swine, too! We were to sacrifice a swine to it!"

"And there was round a Jew to approach the altar with an offering.

<sup>1</sup> Gymnasium, in Russia as in Germany, is a college.

<sup>2</sup> Idol. Hebrew.

"But that same day, the old Maccabeus, with his five sons, had come down from the hills, and before the Greek soldiers could intervene, the miserable apostate was lying in his blood, and the altar was torn down. In one second the rebellion was ablaze. The Maccabees, with a handful of men, drove out the far more numerous Greek garrisons. The people were set free!

"It is that victory we celebrate with our poor, little illumination, with our Chanukah lights."

"What?" and the old man, trembling with rage, springs out of his chair. "*That* is the Chanukah light? Come here, wretched boy!" he screams to his grandson, who, instead of obeying, shrinks from him in terror.

The old man brings his fist down on the table, so that the glasses ring again.

"It means—when we had driven out the unclean sons of Javan, there was only one little cruse of holy olive-oil left. . . ."

But a fit of coughing stops his breath, and his son hastens up, and assists him into the next room.

I wish to leave, but she detains me.

"You are against assimilation, then?" she asks.

"To assimilate," I reply, "is to consume, to eat, to digest. We assimilate beef and bread, and others wish to assimilate *us*—to eat us up like bread and meat."

She is silent for a few seconds, and then she asks anxiously:

"But will there always, always be wars and dissensions between the nations?"

"O no!" I answer, "one one point they *must* all agree—in the end."

"And that is?"

"Humanity. When each is free to follow his own bent, then they will all agree."

She is lost in thought, she has more to say, but there comes a tap at the door—

"Mamma!" she exclaims under her breath, and escapes, after giving me her hand—for the first time!

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On the next day but one, while I was still in bed, I received a letter by the postman.

The envelope bore the name of her father's firm: "Jacob Berenholz."

My heart beat like a sledge-hammer. Inside there were only ten rubles—my pay for the month that was not yet complete.

Good-bye, lesson!

XXIII

THE POOR LITTLE BOY



## XXIII

### THE POOR LITTLE BOY

(Told by a "man" on a "committee")

"Give me five kopeks for a night's shelter!"

"No!" I answer sharply and walk away. He runs after me with a look of canine entreaty in his burning eyes, he kisses my sleeve—in vain!

"I cannot afford to give so much every day." . . . .

The poor, I reflect, as I leave the soup-kitchen, eat their fill quickly. . . . .

The first time I saw the dirty, wizened little face with the sunken eyes, darkly-burning, sorrowful, and yet intelligent eyes, it went to my heart.

I had not even heard his request before an impulse seized me and a groschen flew out of my pocket into his thin little hands. I remember quite well that my hand acted of its own accord, without waiting to ask my heart for its pity, or my reason whether with a pension of forty-one rubles, sixty-six kopeks a month, I could afford to give five kopeks in charity.

His entreaty was an electric spark that fired every limb in my body and every cell in every limb, and my reason was not informed of the fresh outlay till later, when the little boy, with a hop, skip, and a jump, had left the soup-kitchen.

Busy with my own and other people's affairs, I soon forgot the little boy.

And yet not altogether. Somewhere inside my head, and without my knowing anything about it, there must have been held a meeting of practical thoughts.

Because the very next evening, when the little boy stopped me again, the same little boy with the broken, quavering accents, and asked me once more for a night's shelter and bed, the following considerations rose up from somewhere, ready prepared, to the surface of my mind:

A boy seven or eight years old ought not to beg—he ought not to hang about soup-kitchens; feeding on scraps, before the plates are collected and removed, would make a vagabond of him, a beggar—he would never come to any good if he went on like that.

My hand had found its way into my pocket, but *I* caught it there and held it fast.

Had I been “pious,” I should have reasoned thus: “Is the merit I shall acquire really worth five kopeks? Should I not gain just as much by repeating the evening prayers? or by giving a hoarse groan during their recital?”

Not being “pious,” I thought only of the boy's good: “My five kopeks will only do him harm and make a hopeless beggar of him.” And I gave them to him after all!

My hand forced its way out of my pocket, and this time I did not even try to hold it back. Something pained me in the region of my heart, and the tears were not far from my eyes. Once more the little boy ran joyfully out of the soup-kitchen, my heart grew light, and I felt a smile on my face. The third time it lasted longer—much longer.

I had calculated betimes that my means will *not* allow of my giving every day in charity. Of course, it is a pleasure to see the poor little wretch jump for joy, to notice the gleam of light in his young eyes, to know that, thanks to your five kopeks, he will *not* pass the night in the street, but in the "refuge," where he will be warm, and where, to-morrow morning, he will get a glass of tea and a roll. All that is a pleasure, certainly, but it is one that I, with my income, cannot allow myself—it is out of the question.

Of course, I did not say all that to the little boy, I merely gave him some good advice. I told him that if he begged he would come to a bad end—that every man (and he also must some day grow into a man) is in honor obliged to work—work is holy, and he who seeks work, finds, and such-like wise things out of books, that could not make up to the little boy for the night-refuge, that could not so much as screen him till daylight from the rain and the snow.

And all the while there he stood and kissed my sleeve, and lifted his eyes to mine, on the watch for some gleam of pity to prove that his words were not as peas thrown against a wall.

And I felt all the time that he was not watching in vain, that my cold reasonings were growing warmer, that his beseeching, dog-like eyes had a power I could not withstand, and that I must shortly surrender with my whole battery of reproofs and warnings.

So I resolved as follows: I will give him something, and then tell him once and for all that he is not to beg any more, tell him sharply and decidedly, so that he may remember.

I had not enough in coppers, so I changed a silver coin and gave him five kopeks.

"There—but you are not to come begging from me again, do you hear?"

Whence the "from me?"

As far as I knew, I had no such words in my mind, anyway I certainly did not intend to say them, and perhaps I would gladly have given a few kopeks not to have done so! I felt a sudden chill at my heart, as if I had torn away a bit of covering and left a part of it naked. But it was all over like a flash. My stern face, the hard metallic ring of my voice, my outstretched right hand and outward-pointing left foot had done their work.

I had a great attraction for that little boy! He stood there as if on hot coals, he wanted to run off so as to get earlier to the lodging house, and yet he stayed on and listened, growing paler and paler, while a tear trembled on his childish lashes.

"There! and now don't beg any more," I wound up, "do you hear? This is to be the very last time."

The little boy drew a deep breath and ran away.

To-day, to-day I have given him nothing—I will not break my word. I will know nothing of "evasions,"<sup>1</sup> a given word is precious. One must be firm, otherwise there would be an end to everything.

I think over again what I have just been saying, and feel quite pleased with myself. I *cannot* afford to give five kopeks in charity every day, and yet that was not the reason. It was the boy's own good I was thinking of, in-

<sup>1</sup> As of those religious precepts which it is not possible to carry out literally.

deed, the good of all! What is the use of unsystematic charity—and how can there be system without a strict rule?

With the little boy I had spoken simple Yiddish, with myself, somewhat more learnedly. As I left the soup-kitchen, I reflected: The worst microbe in the body of the community is begging. The man who will not work has no right to eat, and so on.

I had no sooner shut the door of the soup-kitchen behind me than my feet sank deep into the mud, I ran my head against a wall, and then plunged into the dark night. There was a dreadful wind blowing, the flames of the gas lamps trembled as with cold, and their flickering shine was reflected a thousandfold in the puddles in the street, so that the eyes were dazzled. It wails plaintively, as though a thousand souls were praying for Tikun,<sup>1</sup> or a thousand little boys for five kopeks for a night's shelter. . . . Bother that little boy! . . .

It would be a sin to drive a dog into the street on such a night, and yet the poor little boy will have to sleep out of doors.

But what can *I* do?

I have given him something three times—does that go for nothing?

Let somebody else give him five kopeks for once!

I have done quite enough, coming out to the soup-kitchen in this weather, with my sick chest and a cough, and without a fur coat. Were I "pious," it would have been self-interest on my part. I should have done it with a view to acquiring merit, I should have

<sup>1</sup> Qualification for eternal bliss.

hastened home, turned into bed, and gone to sleep, so that my soul might quickly fly to heaven and enter the good deed to her account.

The good deed is the "credit," and the "debit" a fat slice of Leviathan.

I, when I went to the soup-kitchen, had no reward in view, it was my kind nature that prompted me.

As I walked and praised myself thus, my heart felt warm again. If other people had been praising me, I must needs have been ashamed, and motioned them away with my hand, but I can listen to myself without blushing, and I should perhaps have gone on praising myself and have discovered other amiable traits in my character, had I not stepped with my half-soles—heaven knows, I had worn away the other half on the road to the soup-kitchen—stepped with my half-soles right into the mud.

"Those who are engaged in a religious mission come to no hurt! . . ." but that is probably on the way out. On the way home, when the newly-created angel is hastening heavenward, one may break one's neck.

My feet are wet, and I feel chilled all through. I know to a certainty that I shall catch cold, that I have caught cold already. Presently I shall be coughing my heart out, and I feel a sting in my chest. A terror comes over me. It is not long since I spent four weeks in bed.

"It's not a thing to do," I say to myself by way of reproach; "no, certainly not! It's all very well as far as *you* are concerned, but what about your wife and child? What right have you to imperil their support?"

If the phrase had been a printed one, and I the reader of it with my pencil in my hand, I should have known what to do—but the phrase was my own.

I feel more and more chilled, and home is distant, and my goloshes are full of water, cold and heavy. The windows of a confectioner gleam brightly in front of me—it is the worst in all Warsaw—their tea is shocking—but since there is no choice!

I rush across the street and plunge into a warm mist. I order a glass of tea and take up a comic paper.

The first illustrated joke that caught my eye was like a reflection of the state of things outside. The joke was called: “Which has too much?”

The weather in the picture is the weather **out** of doors.

Two persons are advancing toward each other on the pavement. From one side comes a stout, middle-aged woman, well-nourished, in a silk dress, a satin cloak, and a white hat with feathers. She must have started on her walk, or to make a visit, in fine weather, and now she has been caught by the rain. Her face is one of dismay. She dreads the rain and the wind, if not for herself, at least for her hat. She hastens—drops of perspiration appear on her white forehead—she hastens, but her steps are unsteady: both her hands are taken up. In the left she holds the end of her silken train, already spattered with mud, and in the right, a tiny silk parasol that scarcely covers the feathered hat on her head. She *only* requires a larger umbrella. To make up for that she has enough and to spare of everything else, her face is free from care, it tells only of an abundance of all good things.

Coming to meet her is a little girl, all skin and bone. She has perhaps long and beautiful hair, but no time to attend to it. It is matted and ruffled, and the wind

tears round and round and seizes whole locks with which he whips her narrow shoulders. She wears a thin, tattered frock, and the wind clings round her, seeking a hole through which to steal into her puny body.

On her feet she wears a pair of top boots—of mud. She also walks unsteadily, first, because she is meeting the wind, and, secondly, because *her* hands, too, are taken up.

In her left one she carries a pair of big boots, a man's boots (her father's most likely), taking them to be mended. I need not suppose that they are going to the inn to be pawned for a bottle of brandy, because of the split soles.

Her father has probably come home tired out with his work, her mother is cooking the supper, and she, the eldest daughter, has been sent out with the boots. They must be ready by to-morrow morning early—she hurries along—she knows that if her father does not get his boots by to-morrow, there will be no fire in the oven all day. She pants—the great boots are too heavy for such a little child. But the weight in her right hand is heavier, for she carries an immense journeyman's umbrella—and she carries it proudly—her father has trusted her with it!

The child needs a lot of things: in winter, warmth—winter and summer, clothing, and all the year round, enough to eat. By way of compensation, there is excess in the size of her umbrella. I am sure that at this moment the rich lady with the parasol envies her.

The little half-starved girl with the merry, roguish

eyes, although the wind threatens to upset her every minute, smiles at me from out the picture:

There, you see, we have our pleasures, too!

As to that lady, I am laughing at her!

On paying for my unfinished glass of tea, however, I am again reminded of my little beggar boy.

He has no umbrella at all, no home awaits him, not even one with dry potatoes without butter, no little bit of a bed at the foot of father's or mother's.

Even the unhappy lady would not find anything to envy him for.

What made me think of him again? Aha, I remember! It flashed across me that for the ten kopeks which I paid for the scarcely-tasted tea, the poor little boy would have had a half-portion of soup or a piece of bread and a corner to sleep in. Why did I order the tea? At home the samovar is steaming, somebody sits waiting for me with a "ready" smile, on the table there is something to eat.

I was ashamed not to order tea. Well, there is something in that, I say to console myself.

There is an even stronger wind blowing outside than before. It tears at the roofs as if it were an anti-Semite, and the roofs, Jews.

But the roofs are of iron, and they are at home.

It descends with fury on the lamps in the street, but they remain erect like hero-sages at the time of the Inquisition.

It sweeps down on the pavement, but the flags are set deep in the earth, and the earth does not let go of her dwellers so easily. Then he raises himself in anger up,

up into the height, but the heavens are far, and the stars look down with indifference—or amusement.

The passers in the street bend and bow themselves and huddle together to take up as little room as possible, turn round to catch their breath, and pursue their certain way.

But the poor, helpless little boy, I think of him with terror, what will become of *him*?

All my philosophy has deserted me, and all my pity is awake.

If it were *my* child? If I thought my own flesh and blood were in the grip of this wind? If *my* child were roaming the streets to-night? If, even supposing that later on he had managed to beg a groschen, he were going, in this hurricane, toward Praga<sup>1</sup>—over the Vistula, over the bridge?

And just because he is *not* mine, is he any the less deserving? Does he feel the wind less, shiver the less with cold, because *his* parents are lying somewhere in a grave under a tombstone? I lose all inclination to go home. I feel as if I had no right to a warm room, to the boiling samovar, to the soft bed and, above all, to the smile of those who are awaiting me.

It seems to me that “murderer” or some such word must be written on my forehead, that I have no business to be seen by anyone.

And once more I begin to think about “piousness.”

“Why the devil am not I ‘pious’?” I mutter. “Why need I have been the worse for believing that the One who dwells high above all the stars, high above the

<sup>1</sup> A suburb of Warsaw.

heavens, never lets our world out of His sight for a single instant? That not for a single instant will He forget the little boy? Why need he lie so heavy on my heart? Why cannot I leave him frankly and freely to the great heart of the universe? He would trouble me no more, I should feel him safe under the great eye of the cosmos—the eye, which, should it withdraw itself for an instant, leaves whole worlds a prey to the devil; the eye which, so long as it is open, assures to the least worm its maintenance and its right? As it is, I, with my sick chest, and my wet feet, and in this weather, must go back to the soup-kitchen and *look* for that little boy. It is a disgrace and a shame!”

Wherein the shame and the disgrace consisted, why and before whom I felt ashamed, to this day I do not know. And yet, on account of the shame and the disgrace, I did not take the shortest way back to the soup-kitchen, but I went round by several streets.

At last I arrived.

The first room, the dining-room, was empty.

The Gehenna of day-time is cooling down, the steam rises higher and higher from the damp floor, and creates a new “heaven” and a new “firmament” between the waters below (from off the feet of the poor people) and the waters above (the drops formed by the vapor). Here and there the drops come raining through.

Thanks to a little window, I can see into the kitchen.

The drowsy cook with the untidy head leans with her left hand on the great kettle and lifts the big soup-spoon lazily to her mouth.

The second, the kitchen-maid, is shredding macaroni

for to-morrow noon. She, too, looks sleepy. The superintendent is counting meal tickets distributed by the committee.

There is no one else visible. I cast a look under the tables—no trace of the little boy. I am too late!

“But at least,” I think, as I leave the kitchen, “nobody saw me!”

Suddenly I remember that I have been walking the streets for several hours.

Whatever is the matter with me? I mutter, and begin to pace homeward.

I am quite glad to find everyone asleep.

I throw off my goloshes in the entrance, steal up to my room and into bed.

But I had a bad night. Tired out, chilled, and wet through, it was long before I ceased coughing and got warm—a continual shiver ran through my bones. I did not get really to sleep till late in the morning, and then my dreams began to torment me in earnest.

I started out of sleep bathed in cold perspiration, sprang out of bed, and went to the window. I look out; the sky is full of stars—the stars look like diamonds set in iron—they roll on so proudly, so calmly, and so high.

There is a tearing wind blowing at the back—the whole house shakes.

I went back to bed, but I slept no more, I only dozed. My dreams were broken, but the little boy was the centre of them all.

Every time I saw him in a new place: there he lies asleep out in the street—there he crouches on some steps in an archway—once, even, devils are playing ball with

him—he flies from hand to hand through the air—later on I come across him lying frozen in a rubbish-box.

I held out till morning and then I flew to the soup-kitchen.

He is there!

Had I not been ashamed, I should have washed the grime off his face with tears of thankfulness. Had I not been afraid of my wife, I should have led him home as my own child. He is there—I am *not* his murderer!

Well!

And I held out a ten kopek piece.

He takes it wondering; he does not know what a kindness he has done me.

Long life to him!

And next day, when he begged me for another gro-schen, I did *not* give it him, but this time I uttered no word of reproof—what is more, I went away ashamed, not satisfied with myself.

I can really and truly not afford it, but my heart is sore: *why* can I not afford it?

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My grandfather, on whom be peace, was not so far wrong when he used to say:

“Whoever is not pious, lives in sorrow of heart and dies without consolation.”



XXIV.

UNDERGROUND



## XXIV

### UNDERGROUND

A big underground lodging room full of beds.

Freude, the tatterdemalion, has been asleep for some time on her chest, in her corner between the stove and the wall.

To-day she went to bed early, because to-morrow is fair-day in a neighboring town, and she will have to be astir betimes in order to drive there with the grease. But she lies uneasy—there is trouble and worry in store.

She had arranged with the driver to take her, Freude, and the *small* barrel, and now, just as she was going to sleep, it occurred to her that it would be better to take the big one.

She tosses from side to side on her couch.

"Plague take a woman's tongue!" she mutters then, exclaiming against herself:

"The *small* barrel! Whatever for? To please the driver? Driver be blessed! Can't he give his horses a few more oats for once?"

Grumbling thus over the stupidity of a woman's tongue, she has just managed to doze off. From beneath the counterpane appears a red kerchief that falls dangling round about her face and her pointed red and blue nose.

She breathes heavily, and presses one bony hand to her old heart. Who knows what she is dreaming? Per-

haps that the driver has broken his word, and she is left for a whole year without Parnosseh.

The opposite corner belongs to Yoneh the water-carrier.

The wife and two children sleep in one bed, and Yoneh with the elder Cheder boy in another.

Now and then a sigh issues from the beds. Here also people have lain down in sorrow.

The little Cheder boy has been crying for money to pay the rabbi his fee.

And the eldest daughter was left without a situation. She had been doing well, as servant to a couple without children. Suddenly her mistress died. So she came home—she could not stay on alone with the widower.

There were a few rubles owing to her in wages—they would have been just enough to pay the rabbi—but the widower says it is no concern of his, his wife never mentioned it, and he doesn't know—he never mixes himself up with the affairs of women.

They quarrelled a little before going to sleep. The mother advised going to the Jewish court, the daughter was in favor of writing a petition either to the *natchàlnik*<sup>1</sup> or to the *mirovòi*.<sup>1</sup>

Yoneh will not hear of doing one or the other.

The widower will take his revenge, and get Yoneh a bad name among the householders: "He has only to snap his fingers and there's an end of me!" How many water-carriers are there already loafing about with nothing to do since they started the new water-supply?

Beril, the porter, all by himself in an upper bed, is

<sup>1</sup> Russian officials.

snoring away like a broken-winded horse. The two children sleep together in another place. His wife is a cook, and this evening she has a wedding supper on hand.

Here, too, rest is broken.

Beril has an ache going through his bones, one after the other, and the eldest son sighs frequently in his sleep. He works in a lime-kiln and has burnt his foot.

Further on lies another snorer alone in a bed: Tzirel, the street-seller. In the second bed sleep all three children. Her husband is a watchman. No sooner has *he* come in than *she* will go out, with bread and fresh rolls.

We are already in the third corner, where stands another—this time an iron bedstead.

A flushed, unhealthy-looking woman's head is set off by a bundle of rags that serve as pillow.

Her prematurely parched lips open frequently, and a heavy sigh escapes them. Her husband's profession is a hard one, and he has no luck. Last week, at the risk of his life, he conveyed away a copper kettle and buried it in the sand outside the town—and it was discovered. Who knows what he will bring home to-night? Perhaps he is already in jail. It is three weeks since she set on to boil so much as a kettleful of water—and they are clamoring for the rent.

"A hard life and no luck!" sigh the parched lips. "And one has to be on one's guard against neighbors. They are always asking: 'What is your husband's trade? What keeps him out so late?'"

Over all the beds flickers a pale light from the centre

of the room. It rises from between four canvas walls that bound the kingdom of a young married couple.

Treine, the young housewife, is still awake. She has only been married two months, and she is waiting for her husband, who will presently return from the house-of-study.

The oil lamp is burning and throws pale patches on to the blackened ceiling. A few feeble rays come through the rents in the canvas walls and dance upon the beds with the poor, worn-out faces.

In Treine's kingdom all is brighter and cleaner.

Between the two beds, on a little white table, lies a prayer-book flanked by two little metal candle-sticks, her wedding gifts. Wedding garments hang on the wall, also a Tallis bag with the Shield of David embroidered on it.

But there are no chairs in the kingdom. Treine sits on one of the beds, making a net to hold the onions which are lying beside her, scattered over the sheet. The soup for supper is keeping hot under the bed-clothes.

The door of the big room opens softly. Treine's cheeks flush, she lets the net fall out of her hands, and springs off the bed. But then she remains standing—it would never do before all the neighbors. One of them might wake, and she would never hear the last of it. The neighbors are bad enough as it is, especially Freude. Freude cannot understand a wife not beginning to scold her husband the very next day after the wedding. "Just you wait," she says, the old cat, "you'll see the life he'll lead you—when it's too late." Freude leaves her no peace.

"A husband," she says, "who is not led by the nose is worse than a wolf. He sucks the marrow out of your bones, the blood out of your veins!"

It is ten years now since Freude had a husband, and she has not got her strength back yet. And Freude is a clever woman, she knows a lot.

"Anything that he has a right to," she says, "fling it out to him as you would a bone to a dog, and—"

Treine has time to recollect all this, because it is some minutes before Yössele manages to steal on tiptoe past all the beds. Every step he takes echoes at her heart, but as to going out to meet him—not for any money. There—he nearly fell! Now he is just outside the partition walls. She breathes again.

"Good evening!" he says in a low voice, with down-cast eyes.

"A good year to you!" she answers lower still. Then: "Are you hungry?" she asks.

"Are *you*? Wait."

He slips out between the partitions and returns with washed and dripping hands.

She gives him a towel.

On a corner of the table there is some bread and some salt and the now uncovered soup.

He sits down on his bed, on the top of all the bed-clothes, she on hers, with the onions.

They eat slowly, talking with their eyes—what about, do you think?—and with their lips about the way to earn a living.

"Well, how are you gettingt on?"

"Oh," he sighs, "three pupils already!"

"And that is all we have to depend on?" she asks sadly.

"*Ma!*" he answers with gentle reproach.

"God be praised!" she is consoling herself and him together.

"God be praised; but that only makes one hundred and twenty rubles," he sighs.

"Well, why do you sigh?"

"Add it up," he answers; "one ruble a week rent, that's twenty-six rubles a season. And then I'm in debt—there were wedding expenses."

"What do you mean?" she asks astonished.

He smiles.

"Silly little thing! My father couldn't afford to give us anything more than his consent."

"Well, what do they come to altogether?" she interrupts.

"Altogether," he goes on, "twelve rubles. That makes thirty-eight. What remains over for food?"

She calculates:

"Eighty-two, I suppose."

"For twenty-six weeks."

"Well, after all," she says, "it's *over* three rubles a week."

"And what," he asks sadly, "what about wood—and candles—Sabbaths and holidays?"

"*Ett*, God is faithful," she tries to cheer him, "and I can do something, too. Look, I have bought some onions. Eggs are very cheap. I will buy some eggs, too. In a week or so, perhaps, five dozen eggs will yield a little profit."

"But just calculate," he persists, "what we must spend on firing and lights."

"Why, next to nothing. Perhaps one ruble a week. That leaves us—"

"And Sabbaths and holidays! Child, what are you thinking of?" And the word "child" falls so softly, so kindly, from his lips, that she must needs smile.

"Come, say the Blessing, quick!" she says, "and let other things be till to-morrow. It's time to go to sleep."

Then she feels ashamed, lowers her eyelids, and says as if she were excusing herself:

"You come so late!" with a yawn that is half a sham. He leans toward her across the little table.

"Silly child," he whispers, "I come in late on purpose, so that we may eat together, do you see? For a teacher, you know, it's not the thing."

"Well, well, say the Blessing!" she repeats, shutting her eyes tighter. He closes his, he *wants* to say it seriously. But his eyes keep opening of themselves. He presses down his eyelids, but there remains a chink through which he sees her, in a strangely colored light, so that he cannot do otherwise than look at her. She is tired—he feels sorry for her. He sees her trying to sit further back on the bed and letting her head rest against the wall. She will go to sleep like that, he thinks.

"Why not take a pillow?" he would like to say, almost crossly, but he cannot—ahem, ahem—

But she doesn't hear. He hurries through the Blessing, finishes it, stands up, and there remains, not knowing what to do next.

"Treine," he calls, but so low, it could not wake her. He goes up to her bed and bends over her.

Her face smiles, it looks so sweet—she must be dreaming of something pleasant—how beautifully she smiles—it would be a shame to wake her! Only her little head will hurt—*öi*, what hair she must have had—he has looked at her curls, long, black hair—all shorn now<sup>1</sup>—her cap is a thin embroidered one, with holes—she is a beauty! He smiles, too.

But she must be woke. He bends lower and feels her breath—he draws it in hastily—she attracts him like a magnet—half-unconsciously he touches her lips with his own.

“I wasn’t asleep at all!” she says suddenly, and opens a pair of mischievous, laughing eyes. She throws her arms round his shoulders and pulls him down to her. “Never mind,” she whispers into his ear, and her voice is very sweet, “never mind! God is good and will help us—was it not He who brought us together? He will not forsake us. There will be firing and lights—there will be enough to live on—it will be all right—everything will be right—won’t it, Yössele? Yes, it will!”

He makes no reply. He is trembling all over.

She pushes him a little further away.

“Look at me, Yössele!” it occurs to her to say.

Yössele wishes to obey, and cannot.

“Poor wretch,” she says gently, “not accustomed to it yet—ha?”

He wants to hide his head in her breast, but she will not allow him to.

“Why are you ashamed, wretch? You can kiss, but you won’t look!”

<sup>1</sup> As becomed an orthodox, married Jewess.

He would rather kiss her, but she will not allow him.

"Please, look at me!"

Yössele opens his eyes wide, but not for long.

"Oh, please!" she says, and her voice is softer, "silkier" than ever.

He looks. This time it is *her* lids that fall.

"Just tell me," she says, "only please tell me the truth, am I a pretty woman?"

"Yes!" he whispers, and she feels his breath hot on her cheek.

"Who told you?"

"Can't I see for myself? You are a queen—a queen!"

"And tell me, Yössele," she continues, "shall you be always just as—just the same?"

"What do you mean by that, Treine?"

"I mean," her voice shakes, "just as fond of me?"

"What a question!"

"Just as dear?"

"What next?"

"Always?"

"Always!" he is confident.

"Shall you always eat with me?"

"Of course," he answers.

"And—and you will never scold me?"

"Never."

"Never make me unhappy?"

"Unhappy? I? You? What do you mean? Why?"

"I don't know, Freude says . . . ."

"Wa—the witch!"

He draws nearer to her. She pushes him back.

"Yössele?"

"What is it?"

"Tell me—what is my name?"

"Treine!"

"*Phê!*" the small mouth makes a motion of disgust.

"Treinishe," he corrects himself.

She is not pleased yet.

"Treininyu!"

"No!"

"Well then—Treine my life, Treine my crown, Treine my heart—will that do?"

"Yes," she answers happily, "only—"

"What now, my life, my delight?"

"Only—listen, Yössele,—and—" she stammers.

"And what?"

"And when—if you should be out of work any time—and when I am not earning much—then perhaps, perhaps—you will scold."

The tears come into her eyes.

"God forbid! God forbid!"

He forces his head out of her hands, and flings himself upon her parted lips.

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"Plague take you altogether, head and hands and feet!" a voice comes from beneath the partition. "Honey-mooning, as I'm alive! There's no closing an eye—"

It is the husky, acidly-spiteful voice of Freude, the tatterdemalion.

XXV

BETWEEN TWO MOUNTAINS



## XXV

### BETWEEN TWO MOUNTAINS

(Between the Rabbi of Brisk and the Rebbe of Byàle)

A Simchas Torah Tale

TOLD BY AN OLD TEACHER

#### I

Of course you have heard of the Brisk Rabbi and the Byàle Rebbe, but it is not everyone who knows that the holy man of Byàle, Reb Nòach'ke, was at one time the Brisk Rabbi's pupil, that he studied a good couple of years with him, then disappeared for another two, and finally emerged from his voluntary exile as a distinguished man in Byàle.

And he left for this reason:

They studied Torah, with the Brisk Rabbi, only the Rebbe felt that it was *dry* Torah. For instance, one learns about questions regarding women, or about "meat in milk," or else about a money matter—very well. Reuben and Simon come with a dispute, or there comes a maid-servant or a woman with a question of ritual, and that very moment the study becomes a delight, it is all alive and is there for a purpose.

But like this, without them, the Rebbe felt the Torah, that is, the body of the Torah, the explanation, what lies on the surface, is dry. That, he felt, is not the Law of life. Torah must live! The study of Kabbalah books

was not allowed in Brisk. The Brisk Rabbi was a Misnagid, and by nature "vengeful and relentless as a serpent;" if anyone ventured to open a Zohar, a Pardes, he would scold and put him under a ban. Somebody was caught reading a Kabbalah-book, and the Rabbi had his beard shaven by Gentiles! What do you think? The man became distraught, fell into a melancholy, and, what is more wonderful, no "good Jew" was able to help him. The Brisk Rabbi was no trifle, I can tell you! And how was anyone just to get up and go away from his academy?

Reb Nòach'ke couldn't make up his mind what to do for a long time.

Then he was shown a dream. He dreamed that the Brisk Rabbi came in to him and said: "Come, Nòach, I will take you into the terrestrial Garden of Eden." And he took his hand and led him away thither. They came into a great palace. There were no doors and no windows in this palace, except for the door by which they came in. And yet it was light, for the walls, as it seemed to the Rebbe, were of crystal and gave out a glittering shine.

And so they went on, further and further, and one saw no end to it.

"Hold on to my skirt," said the Brisk Rabbi, "there are halls without doors and without number, and if you let go of me, you will be lost forever."

The Rebbe obeyed, and they went further and further, and the whole way he saw no bench, no chair, no kind of furniture, nothing at all!

"There is no resting here," explained the Brisk Rabbi,

"one goes on and on!" And he followed, and every hall was longer and brighter than the last, and the walls shone now with this color and now with that, here with several, and there with all colors—but they did not meet with a single human being on their way.

The Rebbe grew weary walking. He was covered with perspiration, a cold perspiration. He grew cold in every limb, beside which his eyes began to hurt him, from the continual brilliancy.

And there came over him a great longing, a longing after Jews, after companions, after All-Israel. It was no trifle, not meeting a single soul.

"Long after no one," said the Brisk Rabbi, "this is a palace for me and for you—you will also, some day, be Rabbi of Brisk."

And the other was more terrified than ever, and laid his hand against the wall to help himself from falling. And the wall burnt him. Only not as fire burns, but as ice burns.

"Rabbi!" he gave a cry, "the walls are ice, simply ice!"

The Brisk Rabbi was silent. And the other cried again:

"Rabbi, take me away hence! I do not wish to stay alone with you! I wish to be with All-Israel!"

And hardly had he said it when the Brisk Rabbi disappeared, and he was left alone in the palace.

He knew of no way, no in and no out; a cold terror struck him from the walls; and the longing for a Jew, to see a Jew, if only a cobbler or a tailor, waxed stronger and stronger. He began to weep.

"Lord of the world," he begged, "take me away from here. Better in Gehenna with All-Israel than here one by himself!"

And immediately there appeared before him a common Jew with the red sash of a driver round him, and a long whip in his hand. The Jew took him silently by the sleeve, led him out of the palace—and vanished. Such was the dream that was sent him.

When he woke, before daylight, when it had scarcely begun to dawn, he understood that this had been no ordinary dream. He dressed quickly, and hastened toward the house-of-study to get his dream interpreted by the learned ones who pass the night there. On his way through the market, however, he saw a covered wagon standing, and beside it—the driver with a red sash round the waist, a long whip in his hand, and altogether just such a Jew as the one who had led him out of the palace in his dream.

Nòach (it struck him there was something behind the coincidence) went up to him and asked:

"Whither drives a Jew?"

"Not *your* way," answered the driver, very roughly.

"Well, tell me anyway," he continued. "Perhaps I will go with you!"

The driver considered a little, and then answered:

"And can't a young fellow like you go on foot?" he asked. "Go along with you, *your* way!"

"And whither shall I go?"

"Follow your nose!" answered the driver, "it's not my business."

The Rebbe understood, and now began his "exile."

A few years later, as before said, he emerged into publicity in Byàle. How it all happened I won't tell you now, although it's enough to make anyone open his mouth and ears. And about a year after this happened, a Byàle householder, Reb Yechiel his name was, sent for me as a teacher.

At first I would not accept the post of teacher in his house.

You must know that Reb Yechiel was a rich man of the old-fashioned type, he gave his daughters a thousand gold pieces dowry, and contracted alliances with the greatest rabbis, and his latest daughter-in-law was a daughter of the Rabbi of Brisk.

You can see for yourselves that if the Brisk Rabbi and the other connections were Misnagdîm, Reb Yechiel had to be a Misnagid, too—and I am a Byàle Chossid, well—how could I go into a house of that kind?

And yet I felt drawn to Byàle. You can fancy! The idea of living in the same town as the Rebbe! After a good deal of see-sawing, I went.

And Reb Yechiel himself turned out to be a very honest, pious Jew, and I tell you, his heart was drawn to the Rebbe as if with pincers. He was no learned man, himself, and he stared at the Rabbi of Brisk as a cock looks at a prayer-book.<sup>1</sup> He made no objections to my holding to the Byàle Rebbe, only he would have nothing to do with him himself. When I told anything about the Rebbe, he would pretend to yawn, and yet I could

<sup>1</sup> Allusion to the ceremony performed on the eve of the Day of Atonement, when a cock or hen is twirled round the head, and a prayer is read.

see that he pricked up his ears, but his son, the son-in-law of the Brisk Rabbi, would frown and look at me with mingled anger and contempt, only he never argued; he was silent by nature.

And it came to pass on a day that Reb Yechiel's daughter-in-law, the Brisk Rabbi's daughter, was expecting the birth of her first child—well, there is nothing new in that, you say? But “thereby hangs a tale.” It was well known that the Brisk Rabbi, because he had shaved a Chossid, that is, caused him to be deprived of beard and ear-locks, was made to suffer by the prominent Rebbes. Both his sons (not of you be it said!) died within five or six years, and not one of his three daughters had a boy, beside which every child they bore nearly cost them their life.

Everyone saw and knew that it was a visitation of the great Rebbes on the Brisk Rabbi, only he himself, for all his clear-sightedness, did not see it. He went on his way as before, carrying on his opposition by means of force and bans.

I was really sorry for Gütele (that was the name of the Rabbi's daughter), really sorry. First, a Jewess; secondly, a good Jewess, such a good, kind soul as never was known.

Not a poor girl was married without her assistance—a “silken creature!” And she was to be punished for her father's outburst of anger! And therefore, as soon as I heard the midwife busy in the room, I wanted to move heaven and earth for them to send to the Byåle Rebbe—if only a note without a money-offering—after all, it wasn't as if *he* needed money.

The Byåle Rebbe never thought much of money.

But whom was I to speak with?

I try it on with the Brisk Rabbi's son-in-law—and I know very well that his soul is bound up with her soul, that he has never hid from himself that domestic happiness shone out of every corner, out of every word and deed—but he is the Brisk Rabbi's son-in-law, he spits, goes away, and leaves me standing with my mouth open.

I go to Reb Yechiel himself, and he answers: "It is the Brisk Rabbi's daughter. I could not treat him like that, not even if there were peril of death, heaven forbid!" I try his wife—a worthy soul, but a simple one—and she answers:

"If my husband told me to do so, I would send the Rebbe my holiday head-kerchief and the ear-rings at once; they cost a mint of money; but without his consent, not a copper farthing—not a tassel!"

"But a note—what harm could a note do you?"

"Without my husband's knowledge, nothing!" she answers, as a good Jewess should answer, and turns away from me, and I see that she only does it to hide her tears—a mother—"the heart knows," her heart has felt the danger.

But when I heard the first cry, I ran to the Rebbe myself.

"Shemaiah," he answered me, "what can I do? I will pray!"

"Give me something for her, Rebbe," I implore, "anything, a coin, a trifle, an amulet!"

"It would only make matters worse, which heaven forbid!" he replied. "Where there is no faith, such things only do harm, and she would have none."

What could I do? It was the first day of Tabernacles, there was nothing I could do for her, I might as well stay with the Rebbe. I was like a son of the house. I thought, I will look imploringly at the Rebbe every minute, perhaps he will have compassion.

One heard things were not going on well—everything had been done—graves measured, hundreds of candles burnt in the synagogue, in the house-of-study, and a fortune given away in charity. What remains to be told? All the wardrobes stood open; a great heap of coins of all sorts lay on the table, and poor people came in and took away—all who wished, what they wished, as much as they wished!

I felt it all deeply.

"Rebbe," I said, "it is written: 'Almsgiving delivers from death.'"

And he answered quite away from the matter:

"Perhaps the Brisk Rabbi will come!"

And in that instant there walks in Reb Yechiel. He never spoke to the Rebbe, any more than if he hadn't seen him, but:

"Shemaiah," he says to me, and catches hold of the flap of my coat, "there is a cart outside, go, get into it and drive to the Brisk Rabbi, tell him to come."

And he was evidently quite aware of what was involved, for he added:

"Let him see for himself what it means. Let him say what is to be done!"

And he looked—what am I to say? A corpse is more beautiful than he was.

Well, I set off. And thinking, I thought to myself,

if my *Rebbe* knows that the *Brisk Rabbi* expects to come here, something will result. Perhaps they will make peace. That is, not the *Brisk Rabbi* with the *Byàle Rebbe*, for they themselves were not at strife, but their followers. Because, really, if he comes, he will see us; he has eyes in his head!

But heaven, it seems, will not suffer such things to come to pass so quickly, and set hindrances in my way. Hardly had I driven out of *Byàle* when a cloud spread itself out over the sky, and what a cloud! A heavy black cloud like soot, and there came a gust of wind as though spirits were flying abroad, and it blew from all sides at once. A peasant, of course, understands these things, he crossed himself and said that the journey, might heaven defend us, would be hard, and pointed with his whip to the sky. Just then came a stronger gust of wind, tore the cloud as you tear a piece of paper, and began to blow one bit of it to one side, and one to the other, as if it were parting ice-floes on a river; I had two or three piles of cloud over my head. I wasn't at all frightened at first. It was no new thing for me to be wet through, and I am not alarmed at thunder.

In the first place it never thunders at *Tabernacles*, and secondly, after the *Rebbe's Shofar-blowing*! We have a tradition that after the *Shofar-blowing* thunder has no power to harm for a whole year. But when the rain suddenly gave a lash across the face like a whip—once, twice, thrice—my heart sank into my shoes. I saw that heaven was against me, driving me back.

And the peasant, too, begged, "Let us go home!"

But I knew there was peril of death. I sat on the

cart and heard through the storm the moans of the woman and the crack of the husband's finger-joints: he wrings his hands; and I see Reb Yechiel's dark face with the sunken, burning eyes: "Drive on," he says, "drive on!" And we drive on.

And it pours and pours, it pours from above and splashes from below, from underneath the wheels and the horse's feet, and the road is swamped, literally covered with water. The water frothed, the cart seemed to swim—what am I to tell you? Besides that we lost our way—but I lived through it!

I brought back the Brisk Rabbi by the Great Hosanna.<sup>1</sup>

## II

I must tell you the truth, that no sooner had the Brisk Rabbi taken his seat in the cart than it grew still! The cloud broke up and the sun shone through the rift, and we drove into Byàle quite dry and comfortable. Even the peasant remarked it, and said in his own language: "A great Rabbi! a powerful Rabbi!"

But the main thing was our arrival in Byàle.

The women who were in the house crowded to the Rabbi like locusts—they nearly fell on their faces before him and wept—the daughter in the inner room was not heard, either because of the women's weeping, or else because she had no strength left to complain—Reb Yechiel did not see us, he was standing with his forehead pressed against a window-pane, as though his head were burning hot.

The Brisk Rabbi's son-in-law did not turn round to

<sup>1</sup> The seventh day of Tabernacles.

greet us, either. He stood with his face against the wall, and I could see plainly how his whole body shook, and how his head knocked against the wall.

I thought I should have fallen. Anxiety and terror had taken such hold on me that I was cold in every limb, I felt that my soul was chilled.

Well, did you know the Brisk Rabbi? That was a man—a pillar of iron, I tell you!

A tall, tall man, "from his shoulders and upward he was higher than any of the people;" he cast awe round him like a king.

A long white beard, one point of it, I remember now, had tucked itself under his girdle, the other point quivered over it. His eyebrows were white, thick, and long, they seemed to cover part of his face. When he raised them—Lord of the world! The women fell back as though they were thunderstruck, he had such eyes! There were daggers in them, glittering daggers! And he gave a roar like a lion: "Women, be gone!"

Then he asked in a lower and gentler voice:

"And where is my daughter?"

They showed him.

He went in, and I remained standing quite upset: Such eyes, such a voice! It is quite another sort, another world! The Byale Rebbe's eyes are so kind, so quiet, they do one's heart good; he gives you a look, and it's like a shower of gold—and his voice—that sweet voice—soft as velvet—Lord of the world! it goes to your heart and soothes it and comforts it—one isn't afraid of *him*, heaven forbid! The soul just melts for love of him, she desires to escape from the body and unite

herself to *his* soul—she is drawn as a butterfly (lehav-dil) to a bright flame! And here—Lord of the world, fear and trembling! A Gaon, a Gaon of the old days! And he has gone in to a woman in child-bed!

“He will turn her into a heap of bones!” I think in terror.

I run to the Byale Rebbe. And he met me in the door with a smile:

“Have you seen,” he said to me, “the majesty of the Law? The very majesty of the Law?”

I felt relieved. If the Rebbe smiles, I thought, all will be well.

---

And all was well. On Shemini Atseres<sup>1</sup> she was over it.

And on Simchas Torah the Brisk Rabbi presided at table. I would have liked to be at table somewhere else, but I did not dare go away, particularly as I made up the tenth man needed to recite grace.

Well, what am I to tell you? How the Brisk Rabbi expounded the Torah? If the Torah is a sea, he was Leviathan in the sea—with one twist of his tail he swam through ten treatises, with another he mixed together the Talmud and the codes, so that it heaved and splashed and seethed and boiled, just as they say the real sea does—he made my head go round—but “the heart knoweth its own bitterness,” and my heart felt no holiday happiness! And then I remembered the Rebbe’s dream—and I felt petrified. There was sun in the window and

<sup>1</sup> The eighth day of Tabernacles.

no want of wine at table, I could see the whole company was perspiring. And I? I was cold, cold as ice! Over yonder I knew the Torah was being expounded differently—there it is bright and warm—every word is penetrated and interwoven with love and rapture—one feels that angels are flying through the room, one seems to hear the rustle of the great, white wings—*ai*, Lord of the world! Only, there's no getting away!

Suddenly he stops, the Brisk Rabbi, and asks:

"What kind of rabbi have you got here?"

"A certain Nòach," they reply.

Well, it cut me to the heart. "A certain Nòach!" O, the flattery, the flattery of it!

"Is he a wonder-worker?"

"Not very much of one, one doesn't often hear about him—the women talk of him, but who listens to them?"

"Then he just takes money and does nothing wonderful?"

They tell him the truth: that he takes little money, and gives away a great deal.

The rabbi muses.

"And he is a scholar?"

"They say, a great one!"

"Whence is he, this Nòach?"

Nobody knows, and *I* have to answer. A conversation ensues between me and the Brisk Rabbi:

"Was he not once in Brisk, this Nòach?" he asks.

"Was not the Rebbe once in Brisk?" I stammered.  
"I think—yes!"

"Ah," says he, "a follower of his!" and it seems to me he looks at me as one looks at a spider.

Then he turns to the company:

"I once had a pupil," he says, "Nòach—he had a good head, but he was attracted to the other side<sup>1</sup>—I spoke to him once, twice—I would have spoken to him a third time, to warn him, but he disappeared—is it not he? Who knows!"

And he began to describe him: thin, small, a little black beard, black, curly ear-locks, a dreamer, a quiet voice, and so on.

"It may be," said the company, "that it is he; it sounds very like!"

I thanked God when they began to say grace.

But after grace something happened that I had never dreamt of.

The Brisk Rabbi rises from his seat, calls me aside, and says in a low voice:

"Take me to *your* Rebbe and *my* pupil! Only, do you hear? no one must know!"

Of course, I obeyed, only on the way I asked in terror:

"Brisk Rabbi, tell me, with what purpose are you going?"

And he answered simply:

"It occurred to me at grace, that I had judged by hearsay—I want to see, I want to see for myself, and perhaps," he added, after a while, "God will help me, and I will save a pupil of mine.

"Know, rascal," he said to me playfully, "that if your Rebbe is *that* Nòach who studied with me, he may some day be a great man in Israel, a veritable Brisk Rabbi!"

Then I knew that it was he, and my heart began to beat with violence.

<sup>1</sup> To the teaching of the Chassidim.

And the two mountains met—and it is a miracle from heaven that I was not crushed between them.

The Byàle Rebbe of blessed memory used to send out his followers, at Simchas Torah, to walk round the town, and he himself sat in the balcony and looked on and had pleasure in what he saw.

It was not the Byàle of to-day: it was quite a small place then, with little, low-built houses, except for the Shool and the Rebbe's Kläus. The Rebbe's balcony was on the second floor, and you could see everything from it as if it all lay in the flat of your hand: the hills to the east and the river to the west. And the Rebbe sits and looks out, sees some Chassidîm walking along in silence, and throws down to them from the balcony the fragments of a tune. They catch at it and proceed on their way singing, and batches and batches of them go past and out of the town with songs and real gladness, with real Rejoicing of the Law—and the Rebbe used not to leave the balcony.

But on this occasion the Rebbe must have heard other steps, for he rose and came to meet the Rabbi of Brisk.

"Peace be with you, Rabbi!" he said meekly, in his sweet voice.

"Peace be with you, Nòach!" the Brisk Rabbi answered.

"Sit, Rabbi!"

The Brisk Rabbi took a seat, and the Byàle Rebbe stood before him.

"Tell me, Nòach," said the Brisk Rabbi, with lifted eyebrows, "why did you run away from my academy? What was wanting to you there?"

"Breathing-space, Rabbi," answered the other, composedly.

"What do you mean? What are you talking about, Nòach?"

"Not for myself," explained the Byàle Rebbe in a quiet tone, "it was for my soul."

"Why so, Nòach?"

"Your Torah, Rabbi, is all justice! It is without mercy! There is not a spark of grace in your Torah! And therefore it is joyless, and cannot breathe freely—it is all chains and fetters, iron regulations, copper laws!—and all higher Torah for the learned, for the select few!"

The Brisk Rabbi is silent, and the other continues:

"And tell me, Rabbi, what have you for All-Israel? What have you, Rabbi, for the wood-cutter, for the butcher, for the artisan, for the common Jew?—specially for the simple Jew? Rabbi, what have you for the *un*-learned?"

The Brisk Rabbi is silent, as though he did not understand what was being said to him. And still the Byàle Rebbe stands before him, and goes on in his sweet voice:

"Forgive me, Rabbi, but I must tell the truth—your Torah was *hard*, hard and dry, for it is only the body and not the soul of the Law!"

"The soul?" asks the Brisk Rabbi, and rubs his high forehead.

"Certainly, as I told you, Rabbi, your Torah is for the select, for the learned, not for All-Israel. And the Torah *must* be for All-Israel! The Divine Presence

must rest on All-Israel! because the Torah is the soul of All-Israel!"

"And *your* Torah, Nòach?"

"You wish to see it, Rabbi?"

"Torah—*see* it?" wonders the Brisk Rabbi.

"Come, Rabbi, I will show it you!—I will show you its splendor, the joy which beams forth from it upon all, upon All-Israel!"

The Brisk Rabbi does not move.

"I beg of you, Rabbi, come! It is not far."

He led him out on to the balcony, and I went quietly after. "You may come too, Shemaiah," he said to me, "to-day you will see it also—and the Brisk Rabbi will see—you will see the Simchas Torah—you will see *real* Rejoicing of the Law!"

And I saw what I had always seen, only I saw it differently—as if a curtain had fallen from my eyes.

A great wide sky—without a limit! The sky was so blue! so blue! it was a delight to the eye. Little white clouds, silvery clouds, floated across it, and when you looked at them intently, you saw how they quivered for joy, how they danced for Rejoicing in the Law! Away behind, the town was encircled by a broad green girdle, a dark green one, only the green lived, as though something alive were flying along through the grass; every now and then it seemed as if a living being, a sweet smell, a little life, darted up shining in a different place; one could see plainly how the little flames sprang up and danced and embraced each other.

And over the fields with the flames there sauntered parties and parties of Chassidim—the *satin* and even the

satinette cloaks shine like glass, the torn ones and the whole alike—and the little flames that rose from the grass attached themselves to the shining holiday garments and seemed to dance round every Chossid with delight and affection—and every company of Chassidim gazed up with wonderfully thirsty eyes at the Rebbe's balcony—and I could see how that thirsty gaze of theirs sucked light from the balcony, from the Rebbe's face, and the more light they sucked in, the louder they sang—louder and louder—more cheerfully, more devoutly.

And every company sang to its own tune, but all the different tunes and voices blended in the air, and there floated up to the Rebbe's balcony *one* strain, *one* melody—as though all were singing *one* song. And everything sang—the sky, the celestial bodies, the earth beneath, the soul of the world itself—everything was singing!

Lord of the world! I thought I should dissolve away for sheer delight!

But it was not to be.

“It is time for the afternoon prayers!” said the Brisk Rabbi, suddenly, in a sharp tone; and it all vanished.

Silence . . . the curtain has fallen back across my eyes; above is the usual sky, below—the usual fields, the usual Chassidim in torn cloaks—old, disconnected fragments of song—the flames are extinguished. I glance at the Rebbe; his face is darkened, too.

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They were not reconciled; the Brisk Rabbi remained a Misnagid as before.

But it had one result! He never persecuted again.

XXVI

THE IMAGE



## XXVI

### THE IMAGE

Great people have been known to do great wonders; witness the time when they attacked the Ghetto in Prague, and were about to assault the women, roast the children, and beat the remainder to death. When all means of defense were exhausted, the Maharal<sup>1</sup> laid down the Gemoreh, stepped out into the street, went up to the first mud-heap outside the door of a school-master, and made a clay image.

He blew into its nostril, and it began to move; then he whispered a name into its ear, and away went the image out of the Ghetto, and the Maharal sat down again to his book. The image fell upon our enemies who were besieging the Ghetto, and threshed them as it were with flails—they fell before him as thick as flies.

Prague was filled with corpses—they say the destruction lasted all Wednesday and Thursday; Friday, at noon, the image was still at it.

“Rabbi,” exclaimed Kohol, “the image is making a clean sweep of the city! There will be no one left to light the fires on Sabbath or to take down the lamps!”<sup>2</sup>

A second time the Maharal shut his book; he took his

<sup>1</sup> “The great Rabbi Loeb” who lived in the sixteenth century, and who became the central figure of many a legend.

<sup>2</sup> No Gentile to be hired for that purpose.

stand at the desk and began to chant the psalm, "A Song of the Sabbath Day."

Whereupon the image ceased from work, came back to the Ghetto, entered the synagogue, and approached the Maharal.

The Maharal whispered into its ear as before, its eyes closed, the breath left it, and it became once more a clay image.

And to this day the image lies aloft in the Prague synagogue, covered up with cobwebs that stretch across from wall to wall, and spread over the whole arcade, so that the image shall not be seen, above all, not by the pregnant women of the "women's court." And the cobwebs may not be touched: whoever touches them, dies!

No man, not the oldest there, recollects having seen the image; but the Chacham Zebî, the Maharal's grandson, sometimes wonders, whether, for instance, such an image might not be included in one of the ten males required to form a congregation?

The image, you see, is not forgotten—the image is there still.

But the name with which to give it life in the day of need has fallen as it were into a deep water!

And the cobwebs increase and increase, and one may not touch them.

What is to be done?

## GLOSSARY



## GLOSSARY

(ALL WORDS GIVEN BELOW, UNLESS OTHERWISE SPECIFIED, ARE HEBREW.)

CHANUKAH. Feast of Dedication, or Feast of Lights, commemorating the victory of Judas Maccabeus.

CHASSIDÎM. *See* Chossid.

CHEDER. Private religious school.

CHOSSID (pl. Chassidîm). Briefly, a mystic. *See* the article Hassidîm, in the Jewish Encyclopedia, V.

DAYAN. Assistant to the rabbi of a town.

DREIER (Ger.). A small coin.

ESROG (pl. Esrogîm). The "fruit of the tree Hadar," used with the Lulav on the Feast of Tabernacles. *See* Lev. xxiii. 40.

FELDSCHER (Ger.). Assistant army surgeon; the successor to the celebrated Röfeh of twenty or thirty years ago.

GEHENNA. The nether world; hell.

GEMOREH. The Rabbinical discussion and elaboration of the Mishnah. *See* Talmud.

GEVIR (pl. Gevirîm). Influential rich man.

GROSCHEN (Ger.). A small coin.

GULDEN (Ger.). A florin.

GÜTER YÜD (Ger., "Good Jew"). Chassidic wonder-worker. *See* Rebbe.

HAVDOLEH. Division; the ceremony ushering out the Sabbath or a holiday.

HEKDESH. Free hospital.

KABBALAH. A mystical religious philosophy, much studied by the Chassidîm.

KADDISH. Sanctification; a doxology. Specifically, the doxology recited by a child in memory of its parents

during the first eleven months after their death, and thereafter on every anniversary of the day of their death.

KEDUSHAH. Sanctification; an important part of the public service in the synagogue.

KIDDUSH. Sanctification; the ceremony ushering in the Sabbath or a holiday.

KLÄUS (Ger.). House of study; lit., hermitage.

KOHOL. The community; transferred to the heads of the community.

KOPEK (Russian). Small Russian coin, the hundredth part of a ruble.

KOSHER. Ritually permitted.

LAMED-WÖFNIK. One of the thirty-six hidden saints, whose merits are said to sustain the world. Lamed is thirty; wöf is six; and nik is a Slavic termination expressing "of the kind."

LEHAVDİL. Lit. "to distinguish." Elliptical for "to distinguish between the holy and the secular." It is equivalent to "excuse the comparison"; "with due distinction"; "pardon me for mentioning the two things in the same breath"; etc.

LULAV (pl. Lulavim). The festal wreath used with the Esrog on the Feast of Tabernacles. *See* Lev. xxiii. 40.

MAARIV. The evening service.

MASKIL. An enlightened one; an "intellectual."

MINCHAH. The afternoon service.

MINYAN. A company of ten men, the minimum for a public service.

MISHNAH. A code of laws. *See* Talmud.

MISHNAYES. Plural of Mishnah; specifically, the volumes containing the Mishnah.

MISNAGID (pl. Misnagdîm). One opposed to the mystical teaching of the Chassidîm.

MOHEL. The one who performs the rite of circumcision.

PARNOSSEH. Means of livelihood; sustenance.

- RABBI. Teacher of the Law; the religious guide and arbiter of a community; also teacher, as at a Cheder.
- REB. Mr.
- REBBE. The acknowledged leader of the Chassidim, usually a wonder-worker; called also "Güter Yüd." and Tsaddik.
- REBBITZIN. Wife of a rabbi.
- RÖFEH. Jewish physician.
- RUBLE (Russian). Russian coin worth about half a dollar.
- SECHSER (Ger.). A small coin.
- SHOCHET. Ritual slaughterer.
- SHOFAR. Ram's horn, used on New Year's Day, etc. *See* Lev. xxiii. 24.
- SHOOL (Ger., Schul'). Synagogue.
- SIMCHAS TORAH. The Festival of Rejoicing in the Law, the ninth day of the Feast of Tabernacles.
- SLICHES. Penitential prayers. Applied to the week, more or less, before the New Year, when these prayers are recited at the synagogue.
- STÜBELE (Ger.). Chassidic meeting-house.
- TAKI (Russian). Really.
- TALLIS. Prayer-scarf.
- TALMUD. The traditional lore of the Jews, reduced to writing about 500 of the present era. It consists of the Mishnah and the Gemoreh.
- TALMUD TORAH. Free communal school.
- TEFILLIN. Phylacteries.
- TIKERIN. Assistant at the women's bath.
- TORAH. The Jewish Law in general, and the Pentateuch in particular.
- TOSSAFOT. An important commentary on the Talmud, composed chiefly by Franco-German authorities.
- TSADDIK. Lit. "righteous man"; specifically, a Rebbe, a wonder-worker, a "Güter Yüd."

*The Lord Baltimore Press*

THE FRIEDENWALD COMPANY

BALTIMORE, MD., U. S. A.



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